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THE OCEAN SLEUTH

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SALVING OF A DERELICT

LETHBRIDGE OF THE MOOR

WRACK

WO₂

THE OCEAN SLEUTH

BY
MAURICE DRAKE

AUTHOR OF "WO₂"

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THE OCEAN SLEUTH



THE OCEAN SLEUTH

CHAPTER I

I JOIN THE "GODWIT"

THOUGH it was not long after midnight, as shore time goes, when we left the sulky red eye of Lewanick Light behind us, we came upon the wrecked *Diadem* and her consort in that eerie hour which hangs between true night and the first twilight of the dawn. In June, and fine weather, nature wakes early. Though honest folk snored ashore, when we rounded Lewanick Point the chug, ke-chug, ke-chug of our motor launch was answered from the dim fields at the water's edge by the shrill dry retchings of cockcrow. Up channel, Venus, now a morning star, shone close to the horizon, bright gold upon a belt of rosy pink, but under the shadow of the Lizard's tall cliffs it was still night. Their crests stood up like black battlements against the glow from the great lighthouse just behind them, now sharply outlined, now blurred, black and dark grey by turns as the lantern waxed and waned. The Light itself lay back, invisible, but its wheeling ray flashed out and passed high over our heads every three seconds, rhythmic, silent, and true, like the sword of flame behind the gates of Paradise.

And if the cliffs suggested walls of Paradise, the

wreck at their feet made no bad picture of an Inferno. Being half-tide, she lay well exposed, her bows jammed in a heap of tumbled rocks, her sloping stern half waterlogged. Behind, floating free, but linked to her by a skein of hawsers, insulated wires, and armoured hoses, lay my friend Fletcher's salvage vessel, the little *Godwit*, and both their decks were lighted and clanging away like all Bartlemy Fair. The *Diadem* was one of the commonest type of coasting tramp, two-fifty register, or thereabouts, and her burthen say six hundred tons. Her engine-house and funnel were aft, her bridge amidships, and she was a commercial proposition from bows to rudder. One of her masts had gone by the board when she struck, carrying with it the wheel-house and half the bridge. From the two masts left standing hung half a dozen big arc lamps, stuck about anyhow, shining like great flickering opals against the rosy dawn, and lighting her decks like day. Joints of armoured hoses sizzled and jetted up clouds of steam into the blue glare; a couple of centrifugal pumps were sending ten-inch torrents overside, like great snails sitting up in their shells, and being very seasick; and the noise was deafening. The pumps whirled and roared; derrick-chains rattled themselves taut, to squeal and groan over their sheaves, pulling about heavy wreckage like giants' children playing at spellicans, and as an under-note to all this clamour a terrifying steady hammering echoed in her empty iron holds. And all this noise and glare were set in a frame of darkness and silence, the promise of day out on the face of the waters, and that steady flashing ray high overhead.

Nobody came to put down red carpets for my arrival, of course. I scrambled aboard the *Godwit* as best I could, barking my shin on a ring-bolt, found a

piece of line, hauled up my packages, paid off the owner of the motor launch which had brought me from Falmouth, and set out to look for the skipper. He was aboard the *Diadem* leaning on a twisted corkscrew of a thing that had been a bridge-rail, smoking a very foul pipe and looking down into the pandemonium of a forehold as placidly as a market gardener inspecting young spring lettuces in a cold frame. He saw me, waved a hand, and I went over and joined him.

I was to learn later that this particular job was a simple matter for skilled salvage hands, but at first sight it looked to an untrained eye like wholesale murder—drowning men like kittens in a pump trough. The *Diadem* had just run at the cliffs like a bull at a gate. Presumably her master's coasting ticket had given him confidence enough to let her rip through fog, not having a notion where he was. Or perhaps he came in to tell the Lizard Lighthouse keepers not to make so much row with their fog signals. They've some casual ways in the coasting trade, to my knowledge. Anyhow, here she was with her nose nuzzling among the rocks like a terrier rat-hunting in a heap of stones, her forefoot crumpled in like paper, and all her forward plates strained pretty badly. The job now in hand was to patch up minor leaks, and build a temporary bulkhead behind her smashed forefoot; but oh! it was an awesome business to look at. Every joint of her spouted streams till her hold looked like the pit of a gigantic water-turbine, and in this drenched abyss fourteen or fifteen men were working like demons. Her kelson was waist-deep, a meeting place of confluent waters which the roaring pumps sucked up to belch overside again as fast as they could rise. Just forward of the hatch a winch

was working. The *Diadem's* engine-room being drowned out, they had disconnected her own proper steam-pipes, and were driving the winch with steam from the *Godwit* astern, fed by a three-inch armoured hose. The fellow at the winch was lowering steel rails into the hold, and it was fine to watch. As each long heavy rail came down, swinging slowly round and round as the chain by which it hung left the winch drums, there would be a violent shouting from below. The winch stopped, wet hands grasped the long rail, guiding it into place, and half a dozen streaming figures would do some juggling with the chain, shining in their wet clothes like otters under the glare of the great arc lights. Then another united shouting, almost inaudible above the plash and roar of waters and machinery, and again the winch would start, the re-arranged derrick chain pulling the rail sideways, upwards, or downwards as might be required. She would strain and tug and jam, the men below swinging sledge-hammers to aid her. Bang, bang, bang from the hammers: click, clock, click, clock, from the winch, until the rail was jammed across the hold, another plate pushed into place, and another spouting fountain of sea water quenched.

When I arrived, the after end of the hold was buttressed across and across with these rails, and the first stays for the forward bulkhead were in position; similar rails, but placed true, one above the other, and with wooden battens clamped to them to which the bulkhead timbers would be spiked.

I turned round, to find old Fletcher looking quizzically at me out of the corner of his eye.

"Now, Mr. Voogdt," said he—he had to shout in my ear—"I suppose you'll be starting to ask questions?"

"True," I shouted back. "How are you, Cap'n? That's a question."

That was a great joke. It took the old man about three minutes to see it, but when he did he shook all over like a jelly with delight at the rich humour of the thing.

"I said so. I said so to Abbott the diver when I got your letter. I said, now he will come asking questions. You'll see. He will ask questions all the time."

"What said Smike?" I had met Mr. George Abbott, *alias* Smike (and why Smike, Heaven only knows) the year before at Plymouth. He wasn't a man you'd forget in a hurry. Taciturn, six foot five, with a leather-skinned, Tartar face, he had a shock of snow-white curly hair, though he was a man well under forty. He was, I think, the most skilled artificer I have ever met. It was told of him that once, deserting the sea, he had bought a piece of land and set up as a country builder ashore. Some difficulty with his five workmen had resulted in their going on strike, and warning off all the other builders' men in the district. Whereupon Smike, gathering to himself two unemployed agricultural labourers and an aged retired postman, had finished the job with their ineffectual aid. He had laid bricks, cut stone, fixed and glazed window sashes, done the plumbing—this was his forte—in a way which opened the local plumber's eyes, made and fixed the roof-trusses, slated the roofs, lath-and-plastered ceilings and walls, and finished by distempering the interior and laying out the little garden so tastefully as to sell the house at a very handsome profit before it was habitable. Whereupon he sought out his five former employees, one by one, committed violent assault and battery upon each

of them, all in one day, and then fled to sea again with his plunder.

The opinion of such a man is worth having. "What said Smike?" I asked the skipper again.

"There! That's another question. I said to Smike, I said, 'Mr. Voogdt will come aboard and ask questions all the time'——"

"I know. You said that before. What did Smike say?"

"What did Smike say? Oh! he said, 'That fellow,' he said, 'he's like a nest o' young rooks, all jabber and eat.' That's what Smike said, Mr. Voogdt."

"Oh, did he, the brute?" said I. "And where is Mr. Smike Abbott, Esquire, at this moment?"

"Cookin', I expect. He likes cookin'. He says our cook is no good, so last night he said, his own work bein' done, that he'd turn the cook on to making some new switches for the 'lectric light wires, and he'd cook the breakfast himself. You'll find him in the galley, I expect. But don't you go kickin' up no row, Mr. Voogdt. We're busy till this boat's floated. I can't have no quarrelling. That's waste o' time."

"Quarrel?" said I. "With Smike? D'you think I want to be killed? I'm only——"

"That's three questions all at once," said the old man.

"Oh, you make me tired," I said. "That's a statement and not a question, anyway. Now I'm going back to pull Master Smike his leg."

I got back to the *Godwit* by the way I came—one of the *Diadem's* boats on an endless rope running over blocks, one in her stern, and one in the *Godwit's* bows—and smelt the cooking before I got to the galley. Coffee—amongst his accomplishments Abbott made superb coffee—fried ham and eggs, and dry hash,

which is pretty much the same as what shore folk call bubble and squeak, and a noble dish, too, when made by an artist and eaten in the open air. Smike, six foot and a half of blue dungarees, was stooping over the galley stove, his back towards me. With the seaman's mysterious ability to lie close, he took up no more room in the galley than a small general servant would have done. I poked my nose round the corner, and got a delicious sniff of breakfast before advertising my presence.

"Look here," I led off. "What's this the skipper says you said about me? That I was like a nest of young rooks——"

"There!" said he, and slammed down his egg-slice on the stove to proffer an enormous brown hand. "If th' old man didn't say just that! The first thing, he says, when that fellow comes he'll start asking——"

"That'll do." I cut him short. "That'll do. You tend to repeat yourselves, my man. That's tautology, and it's displeasing to a trained ear. You cut it out, and get on with your job—poisoning your messmates. Smike, I'm starving."

That appealed to his artist's pride. He handed me a mug of coffee, and, after a peep into the oven, a heaped plateful of dry hash, and I sat down on the coal locker and fell to, my plate upon my knees.

It was full morning by now, getting on for three o'clock; Abbott switched off the light in the galley, and let in the cool sweetness of the dawn. Venus was paling, the horizon beneath it fringed with a few far trails of smoke, and the wet porphyritic cliffs above us were a wonder of greens and purples. Overhead the light was still wheeling out, but faintly, a mere ghost of its midnight glare, the day killing it before the scheduled hour for its extinction. The Channel

was like a steel mirror, its shining surface only broken where a couple of steamers, laying a course close inshore to signal their numbers to Lloyd's station by the Light, left widening wedges of dulled blue water in their wake. The tide was rising, and whilst I sat eating the clamour aboard the *Diadem* sank down, and ceased as the men knocked off work till after high water. Its echoes died away in the cliffs; our voices seemed suddenly harsh and loud; and Smike held up a finger.

"Hush," said he, and we listened.

In the stillness a lark was singing high above the cliff edge behind us. And my heart sang with him, for I was free again, and new from the stale and smothering life of towns.

The wrecking crew came aft along the deck chaffing and skylarking, stripping as they came. Each man flung a wet bundle of clothes on the galley floor and ran off, man-naked, to his quarters for a dry change. Some of them I knew, and these waved or shouted a greeting as they passed. There were the four Charleses—Soden, the dandy, slim and lithe, even now with waxed points to his dripping moustache; Emerson, with his curate's manner, big nose, and wet blond hair stuck down over his forehead like a fringe; Collis, little and dark and active, like an athletic Japanese; and old Johns—*alias* Captain Kettle—bald as a coot, with shaggy red eyebrows and trimly clipped red beard and moustache. There was Alec Hurle, otherwise Convict 99, by reason of his close-clipped black hair and beard, long and thin and languid in his movements, but with a caustic tongue and a gift for mathematics. Of all the gang he was the most daring operator with high explosives. Then there was Manley, who could crush a pewter mug flat, tear a pack of

cards in two, or twist a horse-shoe out of shape with his bare hands. He was a fat man, clean-shaven as a rule, but now with a thick brown beard dirtying his double chin. He was in a fit of sulks because some one had disregarded his advice about some part of the work aboard the *Diadem*. Chaffing him was Bill Soden, Charles' brother, an ex-light cavalry man, with blue eyes enmeshed in tiny wrinkles, a little laughing devil looking out of each of them. He and his crony William James, one of the few men aboard who had actually served his time as a seaman, united in teasing Manley as they united in all things else. They took life together, work or play, with the air of a pair of music-hall knockabouts. It was their pose. As Bill and William, humorous comedians, they dragged on the same ropes, pulled at the same oar, got drunk together, and sang duets—for preference wailing the "Larboard Watch" in minor keys—until their shipmates prayed them cease, and threw boots at them. And a dozen or so more, some strangers to me. A very useful gang.

When the last wet man had departed, Smike, aided by the winch-driver, the skipper, and myself, laid out the mugs of coffee and heaped enamelled iron plates on the deck outside, and each man, returning, grabbed his portion and devoured it without ceremony. The sun rose whilst they were eating, and every man turned a moment from his meal towards the sunrise, little Collis voicing the general feeling by taking off his cap with a "Good morning, sir. Hope to have you with us all day."

The hurried meal over, all lit pipes and made to sleep. Some lay about the decks in the warming sunshine, others, yawning, shambled off to berths and hammocks below. In twenty minutes the only sounds audible were the gentle lip-lipping of the rising tide

against our wooden sides, the larks singing away overhead, the steady hiss of steam in the engine-room, and the deep breathing of the sleeping men. Those on deck lay about anyhow on the sloping hatches, nearly every man with an arm across his face. One fellow near me was smoking automatically in his sleep, his pipe glowing gently and a faint stream of smoke coming from his nostrils at every other breath. The skipper had gone to his cabin, and Smike, having collected the mugs and plates, wrung out and hung his mates' wet clothes around the galley stove to dry. Then he yawned mightily, spat overside, grunted, and took up his post as watchman whilst the others slept.

Drowsy myself, for I had been travelling all night, I climbed to the little vessel's bridge, and sat nodding in the sun's warmth. For six weary months I had been idling in London, trying to pretend I liked it, and it was good to get back to the sea again, and the sights and smells and sounds of her, and the rough hardworking life of men.

The plain truth is that money's no manner of use to a single man, unless he's a born loafer. When I left the sea, the winter before, I thought I'd had enough of it—of the sea, I mean. By a lucky fluke I had come into more money than I ever expected to see in all my life, and so concluded to live at home at ease, like the Gentlemen of England in the sailor-song. I took rooms off Portland Place, bought a kit of new clothes, and set about enjoying myself—and in a fortnight I felt more hopelessly bored than I could have believed possible. All the men I know were hard at work, or, if they were idlers, were as bored as myself. After a long spell of loafing—streets and shops and parks and picture galleries and theatres, and so on—my old

haunts called me. I had been on a paper before going to sea, and so inevitably drifted back into Fleet Street, there to waste other men's time and be a thoroughpaced nuisance: was told so, by my best friends, dozens of times. I'd go into an office where I was known, and ask if Mr. Smith or Jones or Brown was in. The minion behind the partition in the outer office would grin cheerfully.

"Yes, Mr. Voogdt, he's in. Will you go inside?"

Scene, an inner office. Gentleman in shirt-sleeves at roll-top desk dictating letters. Enter Mr. Austin Voogdt, immaculately clad. "Hullo, Smith. How are you?"

"Hullo, Austin. That you? Want me?"

MR. VOOGDT. "Nothing important, if you're busy."

MR. SMITH (*spinning round on his revolving chair*). "Not too busy to see you. (*To typist*): Just get on with those letters I've given you, Miss Jones, please. You shall have the others shortly." (*MISS JONES gathers up her papers and retires*. MR. S. *flips cigarettes at MR. A. V.*) "Now, then. Out with it. What is it?"

A. V. (*lighting cigarette*). "Nothing, nothing, really. I—I was only wondering if you'd come out for a drink?"

MR. S. "Don't play the fool. You know I'm as busy as the devil in a gale of wind. What is it you really want?"

A. V. (*beginning to wriggle inwardly*). "That is all, really."

MR. S. (*testily*). "What's all? You haven't told me yet."

A. V. (*slowly and distinctly*). "I just wondered whether you would come out and have a drink."

MR. S. (*wearily*). "Oh, do quit fooling. What have you really come in for? (*Suspiciously*.) Is it some confidence trick wheeze? You're dressed fit to kill. D'ye want to borrow money?"

A. V. "No, of course not. I've got pots of money, these days."

MR. S. "They always say that. What is it you do want, then?"

A. V. "I've told you. I want you to come and have a drink."

MR. S. (*doubtfully*). "Austin Voogdt, are you serious?"

A. V. "Y-yes."

MR. S. (*very red in the face and speaking very fast*). "Then get out. Get out of this office this minute, you—you Bond Street nincompoop. Go and walk in Hyde Park, you fashion-plate. Go away. You make me tired. Go and get a job—get some work to do. I'll kill you if you come barging into my office again at this time o' day playing the fool like this. (*Pathetically*.) Austin, you don't mean it? You've called on business, really, haven't you?"

A. V. (*almost in tears*). "Old man, I haven't. I wish I had. Only I'm bored to death, and I really did want you to come and waste ten minutes with me."

MR. S. (*choking*). "Waste ten minutes! . . . What is it, Austin? Are you ill, or anything?"

A. V. "No. I'm just bored stiff with idling."

MR. S. "But, my dear old lad, you mustn't do this sort of thing. You know you mustn't. Now, run away, there's a good chap. I'll see you, and have grub with you any evening you like to fit it up and 'phone me." (*Pushing A. V. towards door*.) "Miss Jones." (*Enter MISS J. with pad and pencil. Exit Austin Voogdt.*)

After about a fortnight of welcomes like that I got weary, and remembering I had an old second cousin living in Drayton Gardens, I thought I'd call on her. Lucy Besley's a dear, if she is a bit of a school-marm, so I didn't mind her catechizing me—which she did thoroughly. Where had I been for the last two years? How did I come to be dressed so extravagantly? What was I doing now? Nothing? Nothing, indeed!

She sniffed at that. Where had I got the money to idle on? She hoped I hadn't got into bad company and been gambling. She hoped the money was safely invested. If not, she thought it had better be banked in her name. I was too erratic to be in charge of money . . .

Fortunately it was her At Home day, and her first caller, entering, rescued me. I owed her a good turn for that, but couldn't pretend to feel grateful. She was an Impossible Person with a baleful eye. Lucy presented me: "My cousin, Austin Voogdt, Mrs. Schofield," and then, with a half-scared twinkle in her eye, took cover behind some other woman who had just come in.

I repeat, Mrs. Schofield was an impossible person. In two minutes she had pushed me into a corner, stood over me, and imparted several facts. First, that she was a lady, by descent, training, and instinct. Second, that her husband was self-made and insignificant, and that she had stooped when she married him. Third, that she knew the Duke of Rutland, and that she held the banking firm of Whitby, Harrison & Schofield in the hollow of her hand.

She was the comic City millionairess of the books and plays. I'd never met an Alderlady before, and never knew such a thing really existed. I won't deny

she interested me ; but I was mighty glad to get away, for she was getting on my nerves, and I think my cousin Lucy was glad to see me go. She felt war in the air.

I went back to my diggings sadder than ever. Fleet Street wouldn't have me, and I was dashed if I was going to any more old maids' tea-parties. Former happy days rose up to taunt me, and I cursed the day I got my money, and cursed the town of London from Shadwell to Golder's Green, and back again.

But it's the darkest hour before the dawn. Thinking of past cruises, I suddenly remembered a Welsh salvage skipper and his gang whom I had met at Plymouth two years before. Fletcher was his name—Aaron Fletcher—a little fat man with a round smooth head and big brown eyes, like a seal's. Just like a seal, he was. He had long drooping moustaches like walrus tusks, too, and that completed the resemblance. He was a fine little chap, good-tempered and wonderfully versatile, and he took to me rather, and had offered me a job on his salvage steamer. I sat down straight away, and wrote him—said I'd come into some money, and would like to take a holiday aboard his boat. I'd forgotten her name, though I knew she was called after some bird or other, so I wrote to his home at Fishguard, asking his wife to forward the letter. Three days later came his reply :

“ S.S. *Godwit*,

“ *Off the Lizard.*

“ DEAR SIR,—You can come aboard and welcome, but I don't know about holladays. Nobody haves holladays in this craft. But if you would like to come aboard with us you can come aboard and welcome. Sir, we are now salving the *Diadem* 700

tons under Lizard, and shall be pleased to see you aboard.—Yours respectfully,

"AARON FLETCHER.

"P.S.—You best go to Falmouth, and inquire for our boat."

It took me under three hours to shed the Bond Street garments, rout out old serge clothes, square up with my landlord, and reach Paddington; and I was on Falmouth beach by six that evening. From a longshoreman I learnt that the *Godwit's* boat had been ashore that day, but he couldn't say when she would come again. "A mazed lot, salvagers. You can't never rely on 'em."

He had a motor launch, and the evening being exquisite—a flat calm—I chartered her to take me off to the Lizard. Did some sketchy marketing, and, loaded with bread and meat and whisky and tobacco, took to the seas again.

And now, with a heart overflowing with peace and joy, I dropped my head upon my breast, and, on a wooden seat upon the *Godwit's* bridge, slept in the morning sunshine like a child in its mother's arms.

CHAPTER II

THE SALVAGE SHIP

THE clangour of a bell and shouting from the foredeck waked me with a start, and I jumped to my feet and looked down over the bridge rail. Smike was thrashing the clapper of the ship's bell to and fro, and bellowing at the top of his voice: "Out, you laggards. Out o' them 'ammicks. Show a leg there—show a leg. On deck, or overboard," and as he ran back to the galley, I felt the ship beneath me wake in obedience to the order.

The sun was high, and, from that and the receding tide, I guessed I must have slept about three hours. A shuffling of feet and scraps of conversation followed the bell and shouting; the waking salvage crew stretching themselves and scrambling to their feet. Judging from the smell, more coffee was ready, and, slipping down the bridge ladder to the galley, I found Smike already handing out the steaming mugs, with good thick slices of bread and cold meat. Charles Collis hailed me, with his mouth full.

"Well, Mr. Query-Mark!" said he. "What brings you aboard? All well?"

"That's two questions to you, Charles," I said, and the others laughed. "But as I'm out to improve your knowledge, I'll answer them. All is well, Charles—extra well since I'm aboard here after six months in the Big Smoke. And since you want to know, I've

come on purpose to look pretty, and give a little tone to this rabble here."

"And help cook," said SMIKE, as one stating a fact.

"Under protest, perhaps I may indulge you that far. In the meantime, if I'm to work, I'll eat, please. Where's my coffee, Slushy?"

"Slushy yourself. I'm a chef—*un vrai cordon bleu*. Here's your coffee and thumb-piece. Get it down, and then bear a hand washing up and cleaning out this galley. I'm for bed."

Man after man drifted to the galley, and squatted round outside the door, eating and drinking their coffee. Nearly every one that I knew gave me a friendly greeting, and every other man asked questions by way of showing up my own inquisitive habits. It was like joining one's own family again. The last mug emptied, they went off to their work; SMIKE yawned again, and departed to bed; and I was left to wash up the dirty crockery.

I don't know when I enjoyed a week more. I had been hungry for fresh air and the sea, and here were both, full measure. Above us towered the great wall of slate-grey cliff, shutting out the world of little fussy men, and leaving us face to face with our one job, and the great primitive things. The fine weather held, and it was a week of dead flat calms. Fair dawn followed fair dawn, each grey, rosy, and golden in its turn. The cliffs beat back on us sixteen measured hours of sunlight, day after day. Each night, when the hot red sun dived behind the Atlantic it left behind it a waxing silver moon reflected in the unbroken mirror of the Channel. Becalmed, a fleet of French drifters stayed in sight for four whole days and nights, until one evening a light land-breeze, far above our heads, carried them beyond the skyline.

Our visitors were gulls, wheeling in hundreds around us, bold as sparrows whenever a bucket of galley scraps was thrown overside. Sea-otters climbed about the rocks like cats, and now and again a seal poked his head above the surface, snuffling softly as he blew the water from his nostrils. "Hey! There's the old man overboard," some ruffian would shout, if the skipper happened to be out of hearing. The joke never failed, for every one of the beasts inevitably suggested Fletcher's mild air of brown-eyed surprise, and at the noisy yell of laughter the seal, startled, would dive again. Steamers were nearly always in sight, rounding this busy corner of the ocean traffic: far out, bound down Channel, or homeward bound, and cutting the corner close to report their arrival to Lloyd's station on the cliffs.

Though pressed into occasional service in the galley, I was none the less an idler to a certain extent, but the others had little time for watching gulls or otters. They worked long hours, only the rising tide stopping their labour, and every hour that could be spared was snatched for food and sleep. At high water, the two ships might both have been wrecks, and derelict at that, so silent were they. Men slept anywhere, in fresh air on the sunlit decks, or in the stuffy crowded quarters below. The soft whisperings of rising tide lulled them; gulls wheeled over the ships, sometimes mewing, sometimes silent as their own shadows on the cliff; and the sea-otters came out on the rocks with their families and played like kittens, pretty to behold. Steam hissed softly from the 'scape pipes; the feet of the lonely fireman on watch in the engine-room could be heard on deck; and the clatter of plates being washed in the galley seemed the loudest noise in all the world.

But at two hours after high water the deck watchman clanged his bell, and the hull woke to busy life. More food to serve out, SMIKE or Frank Thomas, the cook-steward—a handsome young Welsh Jew from Memphis, Tennessee, whose whole-hearted ambition it was to be taken for a Scotsman—aiding to cut the bread and tinned beef and hand the brimming mugs of coffee. Men in the prime of condition, newly rested and full of fresh air and good rough food, they were like a crowd of schoolboys. Their noisy chaff echoed back from the cliffs. They laughed at the sound of their own voices, and sought every outlet for high spirits in mischief. We menials of the galley had to be perpetually on our guard. No matter what food was given them, they wanted something else. If Frank had schemed a little treat for their tea—some fresh salad with tinned salmon, perhaps—and they got wind of it, either Frank or SMIKE or myself had to mount guard over it till the tea hour came, or some accomplished thief would ravish it away.

Perhaps Manley would open the ball, pushing his great blue-chinned face round the galley door, his eyes and mouth three round O's, in a ludicrous affectation of childish innocence.

"And what have you got for tea, little Frankie?"

"Now, you get out." Frank would begin to get nervous at once. "Never you mind what I've got for tea. You'll find out when tea-time comes."

"No, but—but tell me, Frankie. Tell your old pal, Hughie."

"You clear out, Mr. Manley. I know your tricks."

"I ain't up to any tricks." Manley's fat face would look aggrieved. "You don't think I want any more grub now, after this nice bully beef sandwich, do you? Do tell me, Frankie."

To get rid of him Frank perhaps would tell, and Manley would retail it to the grinning gang behind him.

"Boys, there's curry for tea, with some of Frankie's nice boiled rice——"

A yell from the galley. "Ah, let go, you thief! Smike, that swine Bill Soden's got our big cake."

Then there would be a scuffle along the decks, Bill and Smike running away with the looted cake, one on either side of the fore hatch, tossing it from one to another as they ran, Rugby football fashion; till Frank and Smike caught them at the *Godwit's* bows, defeated them, and bore off a rather damaged cake, leaving the pair of thieves to choke and cough themselves double with laughter and crumbs. Manley would get a crammed handful of cake as his share for distracting Frank's attention, and the whole crowd would subside into silence as the old man appeared on deck.

"More skylarking, eh?" he would say, and grin. "More skylarking? H'm. Well, I'll just be having a smoke, Mr. Voogdt." He would borrow a light from the galley and go forward to the *Diadem*, to find everybody hard at work before he arrived. He rarely gave an order. There was no need. At sight of his good-natured face and short round body rolling along the deck every man worked his hardest, waiting for no word of command, for the fat little skipper had the gift of handling men.

Sometimes we of the galley had to go ashore marketing. No one could be spared from the working gang, and it was a weary business this calm weather, when sails were useless and the nine miles to Falmouth had to be covered by heavy tugging at the car. One trip was enough for me. Nine miles in against the ebb in

a ship's boat, quite heavy enough when empty, with the prospect of another nine miles loaded deep, against flood tide, and with three tired men to make a wooden breeze all the way. Going in, we cursed the sun that scorched us, cursed the calm weather that cumbered us with useless sails, cursed the heavy oarlocks that galled and blistered our hands. . . . And yet there was something fine about even that—we were helping. It was necessary to bring food for the striving, toiling gang we had left furiously working against time behind us. For all my cursing at the labour, I swear I enjoyed the trip. But we didn't row back. I found my longshoreman with the motor launch, and chartered him to give us a tow, so that we got aboard fresh and rested, well before our time.

It was the first time I had left the *Godwit* at low water, and it was a surprise to find what a roundabout road we had to go to get alongside. Rocks stuck up all around her, everywhere, and we had to pick our way in through a noisy labyrinth, every rock sending back its own rattling echo of the uproar aboard the wreck.

The old man was leaning over the side when we arrived, and helped us get the bales and bags aboard.

"Ye got a tow," said he.

"Yes. I've told the chap to call again with fresh milk and bread, day after to-morrow, unless a breeze gets up before then."

"H'm. Ye must let me pay part o' that."

"Certainly not. It's only my shore stomach. I don't like tinned milk, and the bread gets dry here this hot weather."

He laughed. "Tell's another yarn, Mr. Voogdt. How long's your stomach been above tinned milk and dry bread?—you that was coasting last year. No, ye must let me pay."

"We'll see, Cap'n. P'raps we may get a breeze before then, and won't need the launch again."

"Maybe. Maybe. But I hope not. This weather's good for us. Look where we're laying. Is it any place to be caught in a breeze, I ask you?"

It was not. I had been too interested in my more immediate surroundings to realize before what a ghastly fix we should be in if it did come on to blow, but the old man's question opened my eyes to the dangers all about us. It was dead bottom of spring tides, and every rock and reef lay exposed. Half a mile to seaward the Lizard Ledge was only just submerged. Here and there it stuck up a point of rock scarcely larger than a shark's fin, but the easy Channel swell checked at it, and rose and fell disturbed over the surface of the great mass below. Close at hand, reef and tumbled rock, thrown from the cliffs by centuries of tempest and erosion, were heaped round us in hundreds. The *Godwit* lay as it were in a dock between two jagged reefs, flanked by them on either hand; and now at low water the only way out of that dock large enough for her had two bad right-angled turns in it. Had a gale come on to blow an hour before low water whilst we lay in that place, it would have been long odds against our getting out at all. Something in my face must have shown old Fletcher that I realized for the first time what a perilous shop it was, for he laughed and answered my unspoken thoughts.

"It won't come on to blow without warning," said he. "An' even if we was caught we could get out unless there was a heavy sea with it. We're high-powered for our size, ye'll remember."

It was some small comfort to remember it, but other remembrances less reassuring came to mind. It

occurred to me, for instance, that the *Godwit* had never been built for salvage work, and that from stem to stern she was such a box full of improvisations that behind old Fletcher's back her crew invariably referred to her as "*H.M.S. Can Do.*" Built twelve years before to do duty as a ferry-boat in Plymouth Sound, she had displayed such a gift for rolling that passengers, after one trip on her, chose another route next time. Word got about that she was crank to the danger point; her owners were obliged to get rid of her; and Aaron Fletcher, then newly retired from the coasting trade, bought her at a knock-down price. His friends laughed at him, and told him she was unseaworthy, but the old man knew better. He had marked down her defects, and the first return on his investment was by the sale of her two deck cabins for summer bungalows. Their removal stiffened her, and brought her some few inches out of the water, and the old man clapped a belting round her two feet wide just above her old water-line, and turned her fore cabin into a hold, choked, whenever she went to sea, with heavy gear. Armoured hoses, electrical plant, chains, buoys and anchors in the hold, with a couple of big derrick spars and all the rest of the heterogeneous collection of appliances required by a salvage vessel, lashed wherever there was room on deck, brought her well down to her bearings, so that the crew used to call the wide belting her lifebuoy, and swear it was the only thing that kept her afloat.

She was a wet boat: seas went across her decks in dirty weather as though she were a tidal rock, but she rolled no more. The average sailor-man shrugged his shoulders at the sight of her, but salvage hands are hard to frighten, and harder yet to kill. They were out for high pay, not comfort, and they squatted

about her wet decks, sometimes waist deep, laughing at each other's discomfort. Her fo'castle, originally intended for the occasional use of a crew of four, now held nine men and their belongings. A portion of the after cabin, cut off by a matchboard partition—a stuffy box, eight feet by six, with a single port-hole long ago rusted home—served as the skipper's quarters, which he allowed me to share; and in the remainder of the cabin lived the seventeen other members of the crew, sharing their quarters with a spare horizontal boiler, used when the *Godwit's* main steam was not available. The boiler was braced and strutted in the very centre of the cabin underneath the movable skylight, a shelf nailed to its lagging of wooden battens on either side serving as a cabin table.

When wet weather prevented the men sleeping on deck, the cabin seats served as bunks, their faded green velvet cushions contrasting strangely with the frowzy army blankets thrown upon them. The water tanks were under this cabin, and the *Godwit's* bunker space being limited she generally carried her spare coal on deck, until, what with coal and gear and her crowded crew, she looked, according to young Collis, "like a submarine gone into the household removal trade."

Her appliances were not particularly new or up-to-date, Aaron Fletcher's capital being limited; and it is doubtful whether any other skipper could have kept, and kept under control, such a skilled and unruly horde as his crew. But Fletcher had the knack of handling men: they liked him; would do more at a nod or mildly put request from him than for any other man's blustering; and though they were as hard bitten a gang as ever sailed the seas, readier far with a blow than a curse, on the whole they were a happy family.

Within a week of my arrival the *Diadem's* fore-

hold was patched and pumped dry, the bulkhead strutted and braced in position, and the old man announced that he would have a try at towing her off stern first upon the evening tide. All the morning we were busy hauling the armoured hoses and light-wires aboard the *Godwit* again, and stowing them in the hold; and stout towing hawsers being passed and made fast by mid-day, all hands were dismissed to sleep for the afternoon. High water was at midnight, and the skipper proposed to begin dragging at her an hour before that time. At 9 P.M. a busy crowd was besieging the galley, and Smike, Frank, and myself had our hands full to prevent them looting the place. It was a fine evening, with a rising full moon, and the moonlight had got into the men's heads. They were rested, the worst of their work was over and the job nearly finished, so they were full of spirits and as mischievous as a pack of monkeys.

I had just caught Charles Collis and Messrs. Bill and Bill on the galley roof, hooking up rashers from the frying-pan with long pieces of wire, and was pushing the hot end of the flue-scraper at them through the skylight when Collis dropped his wire and stood erect.

"Hey, what's this?" said he in a startled voice. "That packet's close in."

One or two men ran round the house to see, and I heard Smike's voice above all the others.

"Call the skipper," he cried. "Quick."

I flung open the opposite galley door, and, looking out, beheld a liner coming down Channel. She loomed large, and for the moment I took her for one of the monster boats, about a mile away. But a man moved on her upper deck, and his figure gave me the scale of her. She was only about eight thousand tons, and dangerously close to shore, belting along at a

good twelve knots, all her lights on, with a band playing, and some people dancing on her after deck. Close at hand as she was, she made a pretty picture in the moonlight with her music and lights and gaiety, and for an instant it didn't strike me that she was running slap into danger.

The old man was on deck in a trice.

"Make a flare. Get rockets—blue lights—anything," I heard him say.

There was a scramble to the chart-room, and then a hurrying of feet all about the deck. Some one had shifted the box of danger-signals, never dreaming they would be wanted here, and the men ran hither and thither in search of them, tumbling over each other and gasping out anxious curses as they ran. I believe danger to themselves would have nerved and strung them up, but this peril to others for the moment distracted them. Collis, the quickest-witted man aboard, whipped off the galley roof and ran to the lamp-room; and the sight of him waving his coat, blazing with paraffin, at the end of the rod he had been stealing bacon with, was the first thing that told me we were looking on at a tragedy.

Nobody aboard the liner seemed to take the slightest notice, though she was close enough now for us to see the canvas dodgers at her bows, behind which, as we were to learn later, her lookout was asleep. She swept by us just as one of our men found the box of signals, and a perfect firework display broke out on our decks. That scared them. We could hear the gongs of the deck telegraphs ringing in her engine-room. Her propellers stopped, and, in less time than it takes to tell, were thrashing furiously astern. But it was too late. She took the Lizard Ledge end-on, practically at full speed. One would have thought

the bottom was torn out of her, and indeed, as everybody knows now since the inquiry, there wasn't much left of it forward of the engine-room. She grated and tore half her length across that wicked ledge, her foremast snapping like a carrot with the shock—Oh, it was horrible to see and hear—until it brought her up all standing, and she began to settle by the head.

After the long grating crash—everybody and every loose thing on her decks must have been thrown about like peas in a rattle—there was a moment of horrid silence, and then—believe me or not—one or two instruments in the band started to play again. To reassure the passengers, I suppose. Then a woman screamed hysterically; then another. Then there was a rush of feet and some shouting—shouting that swelled into a hideous confused uproar—and the horrible thing about it was that the sound somehow suggested the noise of animals and fowls in a farm-yard. Then the ship herself spoke. Her sirens bubbled and coughed and squeaked, and then swelled into an awful full-throated roar for help. It was like a wounded beast, howling in its last agony. It drowned every other sound aboard her, and beat back on us in bellowing echoes from the cliffs, so that no man could hear his neighbour call him.

There was small need of spoken orders amongst us, fortunately. Our firework display vanished like magic; the blue lights and rockets were thrown hissing overboard; the men separated into gangs automatically, and our three boats—wretched little things in face of a calamity like this—were a hundred yards on their way towards the wreck before the liner's howling sirens died, to let us hear again the screaming women, the shouts of men, and the ominous snap and crackle of pistol shots aboard.

CHAPTER III

TO THE RESCUE!

I AM, or rather I have been, a journalist, and a plain tale, to be understood of the people, is meat and drink to me. I was on the spot; my own reports of the wreck of the *Aspasie* were the fullest to appear in any London daily; and yet now, looking back on the whole ghastly business, I cannot give a sequent and sensible account of what occurred. As everybody knows since the inquiry, the S.S. *Aspasie*, of the Belgian West-India line, outward bound from Antwerp to the West Indies, Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio Janeiro, and the River Plate, called that fine June afternoon at Plymouth for first-class passengers. These embarked by tender, she left the Sound shortly after six o'clock for Queenstown, where she was to take in mails, and went straight, as though doomed, on to the Lizard Ledge. Everybody knows the evidence yielded by the inquest; how Julius Bouts, steerage passenger, sneaked from the foredeck to the fo'castle, to take his deck-hand brother-in-law, on duty as lookout, a bottle of "schnic." How they drank the "schnic"; and how the brother-in-law went to sleep, and Julius retired to bed much amused at his jest, to be saved later when better men were drowned. How the third officer knew a pretty girl amongst the saloon passengers, and left the bridge, at the moment when he should have been changing his course, to flatten his nose against the saloon windows and watch

her dancing ; and how the man at the wheel did his duty like an automaton—which is what an ideal steersman ought to be. He kept on the course laid down for him, regardless even of the glare of the Lizard Light. The same old theory about some magnetic quality in the Manacles rocks was dragged out at the inquest as well as at the Board of Trade inquiry ; but the plain cold truth of the matter is that those hundred-and-twenty-six lives were thrown away by mere sloven carelessness, and nothing more. A drunken lookout, item number one ; an amorous young fool of a third mate, item number two ; and a skipper, tired out and in his berth—where he had no business to be before the vessel was clear of the coast—item number three. Neither item fatal in itself : the three combined responsible for one hundred and twenty-six poor dead bodies, and the loss of a ship and cargo worth over a hundred-and-fifty thousand pounds sterling.

A hundred-and-twenty-six lives—I'm wrong. That was the number given in the official report. I happen to know that one man, returned as drowned in that report, did not go down in the *Aspasie*. With that single error, the Board of Trade report is scrupulously correct, and those desiring a detailed description of the wreck cannot do better than consult its columns.

For myself, looking back on the business, all seems confusion. I was in the second boat that got away from the *Godwit*. She was a wretched little tub to serve as a lifeboat, being only about eighteen feet over all, with just over six feet beam. There were five of us aboard ; we could take no more, as we wanted the space for people from the wreck. We rowed two abreast, SMike and Charles Emerson in the bows, Alec Hurle and myself at stroke, and Charles Collis steering. We tore at those oars till I thought

my heart would go snap, and once, when I snatched a sideways glance at Hurle, I saw his nose had burst out bleeding, and the blood was running down over his beard unchecked. How it was we didn't break an oar or a thole-pin, Heaven only knows. Collis was telling us what was going on behind us aboard the *Aspasie*, and I tell you we made our tub move along. He was swaying backwards and forwards at the tiller like the coxswain of a racing four-oar, and imparting information in jerks. "Now they're getting out the starboard lifeboats. . . . Looks like a panic. . . . Firemen rushing the boats. . . . Shooting, they are." And sure enough we heard again the rap, rap of revolver shots break out behind us.

"Hey, that's a tip out. . . . Forward falls have jammed in one boat, and she's tipped the panickers overboard. . . . Good riddance. . . . By G—d, she's settling fast. . . . There goes one dynamo, boys. Lights out on the lower decks. . . . Pull, you half-baked sons of slugs. Pull! Hey, lift her along, my hearties. . . . Pop, pop. More shooting. More firemen's widows for the Union to keep. And not so much as a pop-gun between the five of us, of course. Ne' mind. Take stretchers when we get alongside. . . . Here we are. Easy, Smike and Hurle; pull, you others. . . . Back her off a little. There's too many for us. They'll swamp us—and I don't like the look of 'em, anyway. Ah-h, you swine! Some of ye'll be the better for drowning. Pull away a stroke or two, boys, and rest on your oars and survey the scenery."

We had come close under her stern, her name and port of registration: "ASPASIE, ANVERS," in great gold letters just over our heads. As we rowed round her, a terrified mob of—human beings, presumably—raced round the bulwarks after us. They screamed

and strove and fought with each other ; they struck down women, and tore them out of the way by their hair ; they kicked children aside or trampled them underfoot, more like devils than men, unseeing, blind with terror. Some were in night-shirts, some fully dressed or in shirt-sleeves : one fellow, naked as he was born, grappled with a lad of eighteen before our eyes, held him half strangled against the bulwark rail, and actually tore the life-belt off him, holding him all the time against a modern up-to-date life-buoy that was hanging on the rail.

"These are the Gadarene swine," said Hurle, panting.

"They're pretty safe for drowning, at all events. Hey, you," Smike, the linguist, pointing to the bows of the wreck, shouted in French that there was a big boat being launched there, and the howling mob tore off again.

"Now's our chance," said Collis. "Quick, alongside. Speak French ? " he asked me.

"Yes."

"Then hop aboard with Smike when we touch. Take a stretcher with you, and collect eight grown-ups or a dozen kids. We three'll push off again. If that gang come back they'll swamp us."

We touched ; Smike, with a jump and a scramble, was aboard, stretcher in hand. I was close at his heels, and the boat pushed off again.

"Go to starboard, you," Smike ordered. He disappeared to port, and I set out around the after-deck as bidden.

Rounding the wheel-house, I nearly fell over a huddled heap in a corner. It shrank from my feet : I stooped, and found it was a girl with a baby on her lap, and three more kids whimpering with her arms about them.

"Rise," I said, in bad French. "I have a boat here."

She got up without a word, a tall, slender figure with the baby in her arms, and the three toddlers grabbed at her skirts and wailed in chorus. I got two of them under one arm, and one under the other, and she followed me back to the place where we had come aboard. SMIKE was before me. He was holding on to a woman who was yelling hysterically for her child, her child, and standing beside them, stunned and stupid, was the lad we had seen robbed of his life-belt. At sight of my party the hysterical woman let out a squeal, and snatched at the baby in the girl's arms. The girl handed it over, and took one of my three, and we passed them down into the boat, first the woman and the baby, then the toddlers, and then the loutish boy. Then I turned to my girl. "Embark, Mademoiselle."

"But no. Not yet. There are other children——"

She was off like a flash, I after her. SMIKE had already disappeared, and our boat was pushing off again. The girl knew where to go. She'd got a regular little crèche of half a dozen more kids packed into a lavatory by the smoking-room, out of the way of trampling feet. Two more women were with them, in the very extremity of terror, too frightened even to cry, but fortunately free from panic; and between the four of us we got the six children aft to the boat.

Again SMIKE was first. He'd found a lame man, and his two daughters, girls of about twelve or fourteen, and they were already in the boat. My collection made our salvages sixteen in all—six grown-ups and ten kids. We got them all over the side somehow with the exception of my first girl, and the boat looked to be loaded to the danger point.

Smikey made a mouth at me, and then turned and shouted down to the boat: "Hook it," he said.

"Room for one more," Collis replied. "It's a dead flat calm. Hand down that woman."

She shrank back. "No, no," she cried. "I will not go. Save yourselves, Messieurs. There are too many. It is dangerous."

Smikey grabbed her by one arm, and I by the other. She struggled a bit, but it was no good. We had her fast, and lowered her by her arms to Hurle and Emerson. They pushed her down till she sat on the floor-boards in a perfect pack of kids, and the boat pulled away slowly for the *Godwit*, just as the panic-stricken mob came tearing back, and surged us off our feet.

We wanted something to occupy our minds, for the vessel was settling fast by the head, and we knew it would be a slow job getting that deeply-loaded boat to the *Godwit* with only two oars. The emigrants were mostly colliers from the Namur-Liège district, plucky enough at their own job underground, no doubt; but the fear of drowning had stampeded them like wild cattle. They were dangerous. Knives were going. So, to keep us from brooding, we cut into that crowd of vermin with our stretchers for all we were worth. On the other side of the writhing mob I could see Smikey's snow-white head nod-nodding with the force of his blows. Up and down, up and down went his stretcher, like a flail, and every downstroke silenced one howling voice. Speaking for myself, I just let drive at every face I saw, and altogether it was a busy time. So interested were we in instilling confidence into those faint-hearted miners, that we never noticed the ship had done settling, and that her canted decks were steady.

By the time our boat came back for us, the tragedy

was over. The *Aspasie* had gone down by the bows, and settled on the flat of the Ledge. She was under water as far back as her engine-room, and at high water some of the after-deck was partly submerged. The howling and fighting were still going on in the waist of her, where the crew were getting out the boats. But there was enough of her above water for everybody aboard. Not one of those lives need have been lost if it hadn't been for the panic.

Our first two boats had loaded, got away early, reached the *Godwit*, and were returning to the wreck before our own deeply-laden cargo of women and children was half-way home. Our boat shouted to the others that we two had been left aboard, so they put on an extra spurt and reached us before we were aware of them. By that time the stampededers were rounded up into a neat little mob, relatively quiet and well-behaved. Smike and myself walked round and round them, like colliers round a flock of sheep, and if a man stepped out of the crowd, he got a wipe with a stretcher, and went back again if he could. If he couldn't, he lay quiet on the deck.

At sight of our two boats nearing the wreck, however, they broke cover again, and we had to yell to our men to keep away—whack, whack, whacking with our stretchers all the time. Seeing help so close, some of the emigrants recovered so far as to turn and show their teeth when we hit them. When that happened, we both hit the offender at once, real hard, one on each side, whereupon he generally collapsed, and was sick on the deck, or staggered out of the way with both hands to his head.

At our shouts the boats drew off a little, and, seeing we were in charge of the situation, our mob began to behave again. Smike yelling orders in French, we made them stand in a row, their backs against the

wheel-house, and then told one boat to draw near. That made them restive, but only one man broke line—the naked chap who had stolen the life-belt. We both had a cut at him as he jumped, but missed him, I'm glad to say; and he was over the bulwarks with a splash. We swung round to keep the others quiet till he was picked up, and it was then I began to think the decks unduly steady for a sinking ship.

"She's stopped settling, hasn't she?"

"Some few minutes past," Smike grunted.

"What's that mean?"

"Who knows? Ah-h, you swine!——" Whack went his stretcher. "*Tenez debout, cochon.* I d'know. Maybe she's going to plunge."

"Think she's hung up on the Ledge?"

Bill and Bill replied to my question from behind. They were climbing over the bulwarks, stretchers in hand.

"Seems to me she's taken the ground," said James.

I asked him if they had picked up the naked man. He shook his head.

"His life-belt wasn't tied on, and he went down like a stone. He isn't the only one, either. There was a butchery going on to starboard amidships on our first trip. Shooting and drowning wholesale. This is the big sea disaster of the year, let me tell you."

"Now, what's doing next?"

"Have a look round, I suppose, and see what we can see."

What we saw beggars description. James was right; we were safe enough for a while. She had gone down by the bows till she had taken ground upon the flat of the Lizard Ledge, and the danger was over. But the sights I saw in the bright moonlight aboard that vessel will haunt me till I die.

Her fore-deck was under water, her engine-room flooded, and her funnel stuck up slanting above the surface of the Channel. Her boat-deck was out of water as far forward as the funnel, and at her stern, canted up out of the water higher than usual, every deck was dry. Half a dozen of her lifeboats had got away crowded, and were rowing round her in a purposeless way; waiting for her to sink, I suppose. A head or two of men swimming bobbed about on the smooth water between us and them. The after saloon was crowded with people, and one or two pale-faced stewards were actually trying to get the emigrants out on deck, telling them that the saloon was reserved for first-class passengers. In the alley-way to starboard we found our first dead man—a fireman, by his smutty face and hands. He had been shot in the throat, and the bullet had come out at the back of his neck. Then we found another, a steward, sitting on the deck against the wall of the saloon, his head on his chest, and not a mark on him to show how he had died. Kneeling beside him, I began to realize that we were present at a big disaster, when a shout from the others who had gone down the sloping deck to the water's edge called me to them.

I know now why men who have been through a calamity don't like to talk about it. The alley-way under water was choked with the dead, packed and pressed down into the water by the crowd struggling to get at the boats, and William Soden, ex-company sergeant-major of Hussars, and senior partner in the firm of Bill & Bill, humorous knockabouts, was crying like a child with a little wet bundle in his arms. . . .

That's all. I can't talk about it, either, even now.

Thank God there was work to do. We went back and fetched our mob of emigrants, now calming down

and demanding food and beds, if you please. However, we convinced them that they had something to do before they ate or rested, I promise you. I had to remonstrate with Bill & Bill, fresh from the memory of that little wet bundle which these beasts had helped to stamp under water, by telling them that hospital cases couldn't work. We drove them to the work like galley-slaves—a blow first and the order after it. Some of the ship's officers made their appearance, a steward or two, and some of the men passengers from the saloon, and we were at it all night, pulling out more and yet more bodies, and laying them out in rows up and down the decks in the moonlight. The stewards lit stoves and brought us coffee and hot spirits while we worked. For myself, I drank brandy like water, and it had no more effect on me than water would have done. The Falmouth lifeboat and a couple of tugs, summoned by telephone from the Lizard, arrived about midnight, and stood by us, the crowded ship's boats, in obedience to their orders, trailing off to Falmouth under oars.

When I got back to the *Godwit* it was broad day, just such another morning as that, a week before, when I waked to the lark's song on her bridge. The larks were singing now, but they sang to deaf ears. I think the horrors of the night had stunned me, and I am sure that since, to this day, there is a little something—some tiny shade of acute perception—that is lost to me for life. That Slaughter of the Innocents—a thing like that burns something out of a man.

I broke down, and cried like a fool when I went down to our quarters. The after-cabin was like a nursery. Babies slept quietly, two and three to a bed, in the men's shabby blankets on the green velvet seats, and women were quietly going about to tend them—for the other boats had done as we had, and

beaten off all able-bodied male passengers. Under the skylight, standing before the spare horizontal boiler, on which she held and stirred a great bowl of condensed milk and warm water, was the girl SMIKE and I had forced into the boat. Her slender grey figure was erect, and she stirred slowly, her head uplifted, gazing through the open skylight as though listening to the lark's song overhead. In her eyes were mingled hope and fear—and what else is religion?—such as I have never seen in any woman's eyes before or since. She made a Holy Place of that old ferry-boat's dirty cabin. The boiler might have been an altar, her bowl of milk a simple offering, as she stood there with the dawn shining down on her pale face, those tiny sleeping lives around her snatched from death, and her red lips moving fast in prayer.

CHAPTER IV

[THE PITY OF IT

I STOOD quiet for a moment at the foot of the companion, and I confess the tears were running down my cheeks. But remember how I'd spent the night! My nerves were all on edge; if it hadn't been for the brandy, I think I should have collapsed long before. And after those hideous wakeful hours, the sight of that peaceful cabin was too much for me. To find this haunt of rough hard men full of sleeping babies—little lives saved from that hecatomb out there upon the Lizard Ledge! And the quiet women kindly tending them, and that slim girl in their midst, praying as she worked. Pitiful it was. Most pitiful and beautiful. . . .

I slipped into the quarters I shared with the old skipper, wiped my eyes, and came out again just as a waking child set up a thin wail. The girl's eyes dropped at the sound, she beheld me standing in the cabin door, and in that moment the hope died in her eyes and only fear remained. I felt as though she had given me a slap in the face. Why should she fear me? Under God, and with Smike's giant strength to help, surely I might even claim to have had a hand in saving her life.

None the less the fear was there. I saw it. Not cringing or panic fear: if I could read her aright, no such things were in her nature. Women who forget

themselves and pray at their work don't cringe, and I had already seen her calm in the very midst of panic terror not twelve hours ago. I could not think her frightened by what she had lived through that night. Despite the fear in her eyes she was alert, silently watchful, as though trying to prepare herself for some ordeal to come. If talking to me was an ordeal, she could be spared it. I bowed to her, and went on deck.

The old man was at the head of the companion looking gloomily across the calm water at the liner's crowded stern.

"Ah, this is a bad business, Mr. Voogdt. A sad, bad job." . . . He sighed. "Ah, well, I suppose we'll be readin' all the lies about it in the papers to-morrow."

The papers! Give me that much credit: I had never thought of the papers till then. But there was no more now to be done aboard the *Aspasie*. The tugs and lifeboat were even then taking off the survivors, and I leapt at the thought that I was probably the only journalist on the spot. After all, one must get back to one's work some time, no matter what ghastly tragedies may chance to break in upon one's ordered life.

I ran down for a writing-pad, and for the next two hours was busy in the chart-room. When I came out, the last wet sheet in my hand, our third boat had returned, and the men were sitting about on deck, discussing the disaster in low voices, and playing with some of the older children from the wreck. No one seemed in any mood for sleep, and no work could be done on the *Diadem* until high tide at noon.

"Who's for Falmouth?" I demanded.

"Why Falmouth?"

"I want to telegraph this description of the wreck

to London. We can put some of these kids ashore, too."

A few of the men were willing to go. With the old man's permission, we selected the largest boat, and sent word down to the after-cabin that we were ready to land the first batch of children, and that a woman had better come to look after them in the boat. Eight or nine children were passed over the side, Manley and young Thomas the cook seating them down upon the floor-boards, and then we asked which woman was to go in charge of them. After a minute or two of delay, the girl we had saved came on deck. She, too, had some slips of paper in her hand, and I asked her what they were.

"I have informed myself of the names of the children so far as possible, Monsieur," said she.

"Mademoiselle has reason. May I ask Mademoiselle her name?"

She hesitated, and again I saw fear in her face; but she answered quietly: "I am called Trimen—Marguerite Trimen."

"Trimen?" The name was strange, yet it had a familiar, almost English sound. Seeing me doubtful, she spelt it French fashion.

"Té, èr, ee, m, èh, n," and then I saw why it sounded familiar. It was rather like Tremayne.

"I thank you, Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle is Breton?"

"Breton, yes," said she, "from——" she stopped, with a little catch in her voice that sounded like tears, so I said no more, and she descended into the boat. I followed, took an oar, and we pushed away from the *Godwit's* side.

It was my fault that we made the mistake of putting in at Lewanick cove. Here the swirl of flood tide has

swept a little beach into the shelter of the cliffs, which the ebb, held off the shore by the tail of the Manacles, cannot reach to scour out again. I was in a hurry to get to a telegraph office, and, thinking I could save an hour by going to Mullion or one of the village post-offices on the Lizard promontory, I suggested the boat should put ashore in the cove. I was mighty sorry, even before we landed, for the tidal scour that had built up the beach had already brought one body from the wreck, and we ran ashore right alongside it.

"Don't look," I said to the girl. "And don't let the children see."

She stooped over them from her seat, and began telling them some fairy tale in French to amuse them, whilst Thomas and I jumped out knee-deep, and dragged the dead man ashore. Manley joined us, and between us we carried the body up the beach above high-water mark. He had been a short, thick-set man, with a close brown beard. After going through his pockets to see if we could find any marks of identification, we covered his face with his own wet handkerchief. When we stood up and straightened our backs, Manley asked how I proposed to get ashore.

"I suppose there's a way up over the cliff?"

"I'm not so sure. Better ask at the lighthouse yonder. We'll wait for you."

I walked up the cove, my feet crushing the wrack and debris of past high tides, until I reached the light. It was an old-fashioned iron screw-piled thing, and I could not imagine what had possessed the Trinity Brethren to waste a lighthouse in such a secluded corner of the coast, and so near the glare of the Lizard. Before reaching it I saw marks on the sand that told of heavy weights being dragged over it. I could make a guess at what those weights were, and, when

I climbed the ladder up into the gallery round the lantern, found my guess was correct. Two more bodies were laid out up there, towels over their faces.

Two of the lighthouse keepers were standing in the gallery, one a man of about forty-five, and the second perhaps twenty years younger; the older man was evidently an old sailor and the younger as evidently one of the new type—a competition-wallah—and both looked white and scared.

“Can I get ashore from here?” I asked.

“Ashore? Where d’ye want to go?”

“To a post-office.”

“What d’ye want with a post-office?” asked the younger man, not too civilly.

“I want to send a description of this wreck to the London papers.” Then, seeing they stared at me as though stupefied: “You know there’s a liner gone down on the Lizard Ledge?”

The calamity had set them wool-gathering. They couldn’t have been worse if they had been through the wreck themselves, instead of being tucked in here round the corner out of the way. The younger man said he hadn’t heard anything about the *Aspasie*—and that with two dead bodies beside him, and another on the beach below!

I pointed to the silent forms near him.

“You’ve got two messengers from the wreck here. And another——”

“What other?”

“Down there on the beach, where we’ve just dragged him up.”

Both men turned and looked over the gallery rail as I pointed, and I was staggered to see Mademoiselle Trimen had left the boat, and was half way up the beach. She went straight up to the body, lifted the

handkerchief we had laid over its face, replaced it, and returned to the boat. I stood staring—it seemed such a callous thing for a frightened girl to do—and when I turned round, the men had gone to the other end of the horse-shoe-shaped gallery, where they were talking together in low tones. I followed them, passing the little window of their living-room, lying back behind the great red-glazed bay of the lantern, and glancing through the window saw the third keeper sitting by the stove with his face tied up in a bandage. The other two, hearing my steps, turned as I approached.

“Your mate sick?” I asked.

The young keeper nodded. “He’ve got a abscess in ’is jaw. Did you say you was a newspaper man, an’ wanted to send off a telegraph?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you can’t do it from ’ere. You’ll ’ave to go round to Falmouth.”

“Can’t I get up these cliffs round the cove anywhere?”

“You’ll be the first to do it, if you can. Nobody’s never climbed ’em yet. No, you must go on to Falmouth. What did you say was the name of this ’ere liner that’s been wrecked?”

“The *Aspasie*.”

“French?”

“Belgian—from Antwerp.”

“Left Plymouth last night, then?”

“I didn’t know she’d called at Plymouth.”

“She—all that line does outward bound.”

“What line?”

“This line what this ’ere *Aspasie* belongs to. Don’t you want to get off your telegraphs? If so—I don’t want t’ hurry you, of course. . . .”

He came down the ladder with me, and walked down

the beach to the boat, asking questions all the way about the wreck. We went and had another look at the body on the beach, and he offered to haul it up into the light. It seemed to me there was no need for that: it was safe enough where it was, above high-water mark; so I said so, and then asked him why the Trinity Brothers had put a light in such a useless place.

"'Tis a old light," he explained. "Put here up seventy years ago for th' old lines of Falmouth packets. When the big Lizard Light was built, this one was stripped and left bare; but there was such a outcry about lights after the *Mohegan* went on the Manacles that they lighted 'er up again. We ain't a bit o' use 'ere, as you can see for yourself. But with the papers making all this talk about there being no light on the Manacles, I suppose th' Elder Brothers 'ad to make a show o' doing something."

I hadn't liked his manner first, but he became more civil on acquaintance, and even got wet feet helping us to push off the beach. We promised to send another boat round from Falmouth to remove the bodies from the cove, and set off again swinging along at a good pace on the rising flood.

Conversation languished on the way in. We men were pulling our best, and had scant breath for talking, and Miss Trimen had relapsed into silence again. Even when two or three of the children began to get restless and climb about the boat instead of sitting still, it was I who had to call them to order. I hadn't looked at her till then, for I felt a little distaste at her callous curiosity in going ashore to stare at that dead man. But now when I did glance at her, I saw she was crying, so asked her what was the matter. She made no answer, and I asked her again.

"That face! That poor dead face." It had upset her thoroughly: she was shuddering as well as crying.

"I regret that Mademoiselle should have left the boat to see it," I said, rather stiffly. "I warned Mademoiselle not to look when the body was discovered near our boat."

"It was necessary——" said she, and stopped short.

I thought her on the verge of hysteria, so called attention sharply to one of her charges who was leaning over the gunwale, and said no more. One doesn't want an hysterical woman in a crowded boat. She drew the child down again on the floor-boards, with a gentle word of warning, and we swung along in silence till we reached Falmouth. As I was in a hurry to get ashore, and the water was still a dead calm, we landed on the outer beach near Pendennis Castle, instead of going round into the harbour. Pendennis Head was black with people. Some of them came scrambling down over the cliff paths, and our bows had scarcely touched the beach before we were surrounded by a little crowd, growing every moment. Manley lifted up his voice:

"Anybody here from th' Shipwrecked Mariners' Society?" he cried.

From a coastguard we learnt that the officials were on the quayside in the harbour, and he suggested taking the children round in the boat. But there were several well-to-do folks in the crowd, staying at the Pendennis Hotel, and they wouldn't hear of it. They took charge of Mademoiselle and the kids, and carted them off to pet and spoil them up at the hotel.

People clustered about us asking questions, and I could only push my way through them by saying that I knew nothing about the wreck, and referring them to the men in the boat. I had scrambled some

few yards up a winding cliff-path laid out with ornamental gardens on either side, when, despite my hurry, I was pulled up by one of the sights of the place. There are peafowl in these cliff gardens, and it chanced that one magnificent bird was perched on a branch of a twisted Scotch fir that stuck out right across the path. His back was towards me, and his tail hung down barring the way like a jeweller's shop window strayed into a fir thicket. The sight brought me up all standing for a moment, and as I stood still I heard quick feet and panting close behind me coming up the winding path. It was Miss Trimen. I looked at her in surprise.

"I could not let you go without thanks," she said, in good English, with scarcely a trace of accent. "You saved my life."

"No, I didn't," I told her. "That was Abbott's doing—the tall man. Besides, even if we hadn't come, you would have been quite safe as long as you stayed where you were."

"No. Those men—those frightened, terrible men—they must have trampled us to death. You found us: you saved my life."

She and her surroundings made a picture. She was very beautiful, panting, and a little dishevelled with running. Her pale skin, flushed with exertion, was delicious against the background of gloomy Scotch firs broken by that great flaunting splash of pagan colour. I was overwrought, in that state of high mental excitement that photographs one's surroundings permanently on the brain, and I can see every detail of that picture now, the soft colour in the girl's cheeks, the gorgeous eyes in the peacock's tail, and a peep of flat blue sea through and beyond the dark green branches of the firs.

"I'm very glad to have been of any service," I

stammered. "But you overrate what we did. You were safe on board as long as you kept still and were not afraid."

"I was very much afraid."

"Well, you didn't show it. What are you going to do now? Can I be of any use?"

"Thank you, no. I have sufficient money to take me——" She couldn't say "home." She paused, and burst out crying in good earnest, her hands before her face. I took her by the arm.

"You're in trouble, and you're afraid of something. I could see that this morning. Can I help?"

But she only went on crying, so there was nothing to do but to let her have her cry out. When she had wiped her eyes, I asked again.

"Can I help you in any way, Miss Trimen?"

"No. No. I thank you. You are very good, but I have all I need."

"What are you afraid of?"

Again that look came into her eyes, and I pressed my question. "What is it you are afraid of?"

It was no good. She looked me fair in the eyes, and lied.

"I have nothing to fear, I thank you. I must go. I have to go to the hotel. Believe me, I need no help. I have enough money to take me"—her voice clicked, but she got the word out all right this time—"to take me home."

What more could a man do? If she wouldn't tell, she wouldn't; and if she had a secret fear, my worrying her wouldn't help. I gave her my name and address, and she told me she lived at Brest. What address? She had none at present. And so we parted.

I had helped save her life—she admitted as much herself—and she had refused me her address! That

was flattering to a man's vanity. To quote the sailor's saying, I hadn't even got the ship's cat to kick, by way of passing it on, so pulled a couple of feathers out of the peacock's tail just to show him he was blocking the path. He went off, flapping and squawking into the thickets, most indignant about it; I got to the post office without further delay, and my stuff was at the office of the *Morning Chronicle* well before noon, signed "Voogdt, Pendennis Hotel, Falmouth." It occurred to me that it was about time I had something to eat, so went round to the hotel, hoping for another glimpse of Miss Trimen. But she was nowhere in sight—some of the women visitors presumably had taken charge of her and put her to bed—so I ordered a good meal and sent down to the beach for our men to come up and share it.

When we sat down Manley's first words were to ask if "that young woman from the wreck" wasn't staying in the same hotel, and I told him I believed she was. "She's turned in," I added. "I expect she's worn out."

"Ah. Very likely. D'ye reckon she's French, Mr. Voogdt?"

"I know she is."

"She speaks English good for a Frenchwoman, then."

"How do you know?" I hadn't heard her speak a word of English till she overtook me on the cliff path.

"When you was up at the light, it was. She asked in English what sort o' lookin' chap was that body we run into when we went ashore? Him we carried up the beach. 'A shortish man wi' a close-cropped beard,' I told her."

"What did she say?"

"Nothin'. That was all she said—in English, any-

way. She spoke to them kids like she was tellin' 'em to bide quiet while she was gone, and then she jumped ashore and went and had a look at the body for herself. D'ye reckon she understood what I said, or didn't she believe me ? "

I didn't know, and said so. Perhaps she hadn't understood him. Whether she had or not, her question might account for her going to inspect the dead man's face. She might have thought she could identify him as a fellow passenger. Remembering her care to ascertain the names of the children aboard the *Godwit*, I concluded that must have been her purpose, and was glad to think so. Identification of the dead was a duty, a very different matter from the cold-blooded curiosity of which I had suspected her.

Whilst we were sitting at table a wire was handed me from my friend Jermyn, chief sub-editor on the *Chronicle*, who had threatened only the week before to have me thrown out of the office. He meant it, too, at the time. Now he said :

"Heaven bless you prodigal send us some more am purchasing one special fatted calf when you come home all will forgiven."

It's queer how men's ruling passions will peep out at all sorts of strange times and in all sorts of funny ways. I passed the wire to the others. Manley read it and said nothing ; but Frank Thomas, the young Welsh American Jew who called himself a Scotsman, counted every word in the message and address, and then, fresh from a tragedy that had unnerved us all—

"H'm," said he. "Twenty-seven words. That's one and three ha'pence. He could ha' saved the three ha'pence if he'd left out 'prodigal,' 'special,' and 'fatted.' And it wouldn't ha' interfered with the sense, neither."

CHAPTER V

£5000 REWARD

MISS TRIMEN put in no appearance, and after dawdling over the meal as long as I dared, we scrambled down to the beach, and re-embarked about one o'clock. All the way round to the Lizard the water was thick with boats. Sightseers and officials of all sorts were going out to the *Aspasie*, watermen plying for fares as though it were Regatta day. Loafers from the waterside were sneaking off to see what they could steal, coastguard boats following to keep an eye on them and see they got no chance, and every now and again we met a boat or two inward bound from the *Aspasie* to Falmouth harbour. Some were full of visitors that had been off to see the wreck, some were bringing ashore survivors—emigrants, saloon passengers, stewards, or crew—and once in a while a loaded boat would pass with its crew rowing in silence and an oar or spar serving as a mast, some substitute for a flag half-masted on it. These were bringing ashore the dead we had laid out on the *Aspasie's* deck in the early morning hours, and all the people in the other boats uncovered as they passed.

When we reached the Lizard we found our men had been busy in our absence. The *Diadem* was well afloat, a good quarter of a mile from the cliffs. She was rather down by the head, but not too deep for

towing, and a boat's crew from the *Godwit* was transferring the hawsers from her stern to her bows preparatory to towing her round to Falmouth. Bearing in mind Jermyn's instructions I asked Manley and Thomas to put me aboard the *Aspasie* before they went aboard the *Godwit*, and in less than half an hour, standing on the liner's stern, saw the last of the *Diadem* as her little salvor towed her round Lewanick point.

There was really very little to do aboard the *Aspasie*. I found the purser and got a list of saloon passengers, collected some sketchy information, stories of survivors, and so on, and then went ashore with my longshore pal from Falmouth, whose launch, filled with curious trippers, was lying alongside. I put up at the Pendennis Hotel—it was about eight in the evening when I got there—and the first thing I did was to ask at the office if the young lady survivor had got up yet.

"Got up? She's gone," said the bookkeeper.

"Gone?" She hadn't been long about it.

"Yes. She caught the 5.42."

Did the bookkeeper know where she had gone? No, she didn't. Did the man who had driven her to the station know? The bus-driver, produced, said No, he didn't, either. "The young lady didn't have no luggage, sir, so I couldn't tell where she went, not having no trunks to label."

I cursed inwardly. Of course, she had said good-bye to me in the morning, but I never imagined she would be gone before I got back from the *Aspasie*. Then, seeing it was no good cursing, I went to the writing-room, got off my story of the wreck and posted it to London, wiring Jermyn that I had done so.

He wired back that I was to stay on the spot and

send him a column a day. I'd have seen him hanged first, but I had a sort of sneaking hope that the girl might turn up at Falmouth again before she returned to France, so I stayed and did as I was bid.

On the second day there was another scare-head in the *Chronicle* alongside my own stuff. Bernard Schofield, of Whitby, Harrison & Schofield, the bankers, had absconded, and all the evidence pointed to his having embarked on the *Aspasie* at Plymouth. Elaboration of the question, Was he drowned or was he a survivor? pretty well filled half a column. It appeared that he had got away with about £80,000, partly in French and partly in English notes, so he was worth the catching. I wondered if the notes were still aboard the *Aspasie* and whether they were submerged or no? Then the remembrance of Mrs. Schofield—that appalling woman I had met at my cousin, Lucy Besley's—came to mind: and it occurred to me that Schofield had a good reason for clearing out, even without his £80,000. It seemed queer that I should accidentally have met the woman and then come straight to this wreck where her husband was aboard.

That afternoon I had a visitor, a man of about thirty-six, superior Metropolitan policeman stamped all over him, despite his civilian clothes.

“What can I do for you?” I asked.

“I understand you were aboard the *Aspasie* at the time of the wreck?” said he.

“I was aboard her shortly afterwards,” I told him.

“What is it you want?”

He was a bit slow in coming to the point, so I helped him.

“Look here,” said I. “You’re Scotland Yard, aren’t you? Yes? I thought so. Now tell me

what you want, and if I can help you I will. Is it about Bernard Schofield ? ”

Yes, it was, he said, and I told him all I could, which was nothing much. The only man I'd seen answering at all to Schofield's published description was the dead man we had found on Lewanick beach.

My detective took in all I had to say and then went off to see whether that body had been brought ashore. He'd inspected all the others, which were laid out in the Town Hall. Before he went he gave me some more or less interesting information. The affairs of Whitby, Harrison & Schofield were said to be in a chaotic condition, even without this final embezzlement. Rumour said the firm was in such a bad way that Bernard Schofield had practically no alternative between absconding and being hauled into an inquiry that would have smashed him as certainly as his detection now. (Again thinking of Mistress Schofield, it struck me that her husband must have had a pleasant existence, if his only refuge from the worries of business was in her society ; and I began to sympathize with the chap.) His plunder consisted of about £55,000 worth of French notes—Banque de la République—and the balance in notes of the Bank of England. He didn't seem to stand much of a chance to get rid of the stuff, for all the numbers of the French notes were known, my detective informed me, and those of some of the English ones as well.

“ There's a reward to be offered,” said he.

“ How much ? ”

“ Five thousand, sir.”

“ Anything for his dead body ? No ? Hard luck. I suppose I should come in for some of it, if that's his body we found on Lewanick beach, eh ? ”

"Yes, sir. I suppose so, sir." He took his hat and marched off to make sure.

This news sent me off to the *Aspasie* again, to find half a dozen detectives and some local police in charge of her. They had ascertained that Schofield's cabin was well forward of the engine-room, deep under water even at the bottom of ebb tide, so that if the notes were there, there was no fear of anybody stealing them. His body hadn't been found, but every survivor had been traced or interviewed, and he wasn't amongst them. The presumption was that the poor scamp was in his cabin, drowned with his plunder, or that his body was at the bottom of the Channel.

Next day the papers announced the offer of £5000 reward, and two days later it was doubled. I suppose the authorities, deciding Schofield was drowned, thought they might as well make a splash whilst they were about it. They also published the numbers of the stolen notes, and the first series caught my attention. Glancing carelessly at the columns, the very first number I saw looked something like my own name. The distinguishing letters for one series were A and V, and the first few numbers given started with two ciphers. The number that leaped to my eye was A.V.00697, which at a careless glance doesn't look unlike A. VOOGDT. This particular series was of low value—100 franc notes, if I remember rightly—and after the first feeling of faint curiosity, I dismissed the matter from my mind and went down to the quay to pay my daily visit to old Fletcher. The *Godwit's* crew—she was lying in harbour till the *Diadem* was got into dry dock—were highly excited about the robbery. Frank Thomas had even suggested a raid on the *Aspasie*.

"Tecs!" said he, with scorn. "Who's afraid of a lot o' rozzers and pink-faced country cops? Why, you and Smike, didn't you give a leathering to sixty emigrants"—the number was growing, inevitably—"what tried to chuck you over the side of the *Aspasy*? You an' me an' Smike an' the four Charleses an' Bill an' Bill—Why, Smike, ol' man, we could eat that lot o' coppers. Slip your diving dress an' th' air-pumps into our big boat an' go off an' take charge. Eighty thousand quid, ol' man"—he licked his lips and fidgeted—"all to be got by a skilled diver like you in half an hour, for the asking."

"You're a fool," said I. And Smike, after due consideration, agreed that he was a fool. Then all the others called him a fool also, and told him he was a Jew and a rotten cook. Being in a fretful mood—for it's very riling to reflect that one has been within arm's-length of a stolen fortune and never known it—they piled insult on insult until the unfortunate Frank retired to his galley grumbling at their lack of enterprise.

I stayed on at Falmouth, still hoping that Miss Trimen would return, but nothing came of it. She was gone, and it was long odds against my ever seeing her again. Meanwhile I attended the inquest, sent off my stuff to the *Morning Chronicle* every day, and filled in my spare time by helping all I could in the distribution of money and clothes and so on to the survivors. There was a big relief fund, and many of them were better off after the wreck than ever they had been before. When the *Diadem* went into dry dock, the *Godwit* steamed away round to the Bristol Channel, where a Cardiff collier, having gone ashore near Padstow, needed her services. So I was left alone until, public interest dying down, Jermyn in-

formed me that he didn't want any more of my "rotten lies" about the wreck, and I was left at a loose end again. Lloyd's people, having taken charge of the *Aspasie*, were setting about the raising of her and visitors were not encouraged aboard. There was nothing more to do at Falmouth, so I packed up and went to town.

My best friend, Jem West, met me at Paddington, and I could see he was rather down in the mouth for a man just back from his honeymoon. Naturally I didn't care to ask what was the trouble at first. His wife and I had been the best of pals when she was Pamela Brand, but she was a little devil, past denying, with a tongue as long as to-day and to-morrow, and I rather thought she might have been putting it across him. However, he brightened up so when I inquired after her that I saw there was nothing wrong in that direction.

"It's this cursed failure, Austin," he said. "I had eight thousand quid in Whitby, Harrison & Schofield—nearly all I had in the world, as you know."

"The devil you did!" said I.

I was upset at the news, and my latent sympathy for Bernard Schofield vanished at once. To think of his jolly little home, and Jem, my best pal, and his wife a pal too—for, for all her chatter and bossing things about and innate devilry, I never met a better, pluckier little girl than Pamela West—to think of all their happiness being upset by that thieving scoundrel. Jem West and myself had earned our money side by side, and half of mine was his whenever he wanted it. But he'd die before he'd take it. I knew that, and even if he took it, it wouldn't last for ever. I took my leave of him chaffing and cheerful as possible outwardly, but I felt very depressed about it

afterwards. 'Tisn't much catch for a woman being a sailor's wife, and lying awake nights whenever it blows; and for a woman to keep a husband on her own money is never a very satisfactory arrangement, either. If he's a man it irks him, and he girds at it: and if he doesn't gird at it, he's no man. And women are very human: they like a man for a husband, mostly.

Their troubles gave me a bad taste in my mouth to start with, and I soon got tired of London again. Jermyn loved me, of course, for about three days; and two or three others in Fleet Street lunched with me at this club or that and said sweet things about my being a fine quick workman, and I purred while they stroked me. But they soon got sick of me, idling about and wasting their time, so that I began to meditate whether I wouldn't go off and join the *Godwit* again in search of more adventures on the high seas. Whilst I was hesitating about it came another letter from old Fletcher.

S.S. *Godwit*, BIDEFORD.

"DEAR SIR,—I beg to thank you for your letter, and the pictures." (I had sent him some snapshots I had taken when aboard.) "All aboard sends kind regards and best wishes, hoping you are well. Sir, H.M.S. *Vedette* which went ashore near the shutter lundy I. is for sale by order of Admiralty to be broke up on conditions she is to be broke up and not to be refloated. I guess she could be bought for 600*£*. Sir you said you had come into some money. If you have got so much as £300 I can put up the other 300; and I have heard on the quiet she could be bought for 600. Sir her stern is under water at ebb times F. and C.* and the Admiralty have not took her

* The *Nautical Almanac* abbreviation for full and change of the moon, when the highest and lowest spring tides occur.—A. V.

propellers which they are manganese bronze & worth £750 easy. Smike has been down and says they ant damaged and not jammed, we can blow her tail shafts in two with jellignite dead easy. Please reply to P.O. Bideford.—Yours respectfully,

AARON FLETCHER.

“P.S.—All aboard they hopes you are well and sends kind regards and best wishes from all aboard.”

I wired, “Will take share as offered letter follows,” and then wrote more fully confirming my wire. In three days came a telegram, “Bought *Vedette* sailing Lundy to-night.”

I caught the next train to Bideford, where I chartered a shore boat to put me off to Lundy, there to find the gang of ruffians busy picking the bones of H.M.S. *Vedette*, ex-third-class cruiser.

CHAPTER VI

ONCE MORE THE "GODWIT"

WHAT I like about salvage work is its constant variety. Here, at Lundy Island, the *Vedette* lay with her stern submerged at high-tide, among rocks at the foot of a high cliff with a light-house atop, much as the *Diadem* had done. Save for the facts that the South Lundy light revolved slowly once a minute instead of flashing every three seconds like the *Lizard*, and that the *Vedette* lay broadside on to the cliff instead of end on, like the *Diadem*, it might seem at first sight as though we had come from one salvage job to another exactly like it.

But as a matter of fact the conditions were entirely different. Aboard the *Diadem* our business had been to patch, repair, and refloat the hull, and the moment she was towed ashore to the shipwrights our work was done. We weren't paid to look after the vessel's fittings. Indeed, I think we did as much damage on her decks and in her cabins as her stranding had done. Many a polished panel of good sound Austrian oak from her chart-room have I seen split to light the *Godwit's* galley fire; and when she was towed into Falmouth harbour her owners complained that her charts, barometer, mizzen-boom, two or three clocks, and some other minor matters were missing as well. Now at Lundy, I discovered that Frank Thomas had come by a new outfit of crockery and saucepans in the galley, and there was a fine new

derrick-spar lashed on deck that looked uncommonly like the mizzen-boom of the *Diadem*.

But here it wasn't a question of petty pilfering like that. Instead of repairing the hull with an utter disregard of the fittings, it was our business to smash the *Vedette* to pieces in order that we might get out of her anything that could be removed and sold. Old Fletcher's first anxiety was to remove her propellers and so make sure of getting our purchase money back. They were under water at all states of the tide, so SMIKE Abbott, skilled diver, who aboard the *Diadem* had so little to do that he took on cook's and deck watchman's duties, setting Frank Thomas free to make himself useful as an electrician, was now the busiest man aboard, with Alexander Hurle, explosive expert, and two of the Charleses, Soden and Johns, air-pump men, waiting on him hand and foot.

He almost lived in his diving dress—a figure of fun he looked in it, too. A six-foot-five giant clad in slabs of rhinoceros hide, with his head cased in a diver's helmet or with its crop of snow-white curls emerging from a polished brass collar is a thing one looks at twice. As for Hurle, he spent his days in an abstracted frame of mind between the skipper's cabin, where the explosives were kept, and the stern of the *Vedette*, where SMIKE was placing gelignite cartridges under water to blow off the bosses of the tail-shafts. Hurle's job it was to prepare the charges and detonators, and for the time being he might have been the most unpopular man aboard. His mates avoided him in the most pointed manner. If he walked on one side of the *Godwit's* deck, they took the other, and at one meal the very sight of him coming round the corner with a lump of something stuck inside the breast of his shirt, scattered them like a covey of frightened partridges.

It was wonderful to see them at their work. Built for war, to resist heavy weather and heavy gunfire, the *Vedette* yet seemed almost to crumble before them. They cut into her steel sides like a grocer into a cheese. Her armour belt of course was beyond their powers: a thing built to withstand nine-inch projectiles will stand a bit of knocking about. But they tore away her upperworks like so much gingerbread: I have known them blow the side out of a deck cabin to get at fittings too large to go through the door, as casually—and pretty well as neatly—as a man could open a box of sardines. They tore, and cut, and hammered, and blasted away at her above high-water mark, night and day, working in two gangs, until it seemed to me as though she were a leaden ship instead of a steel one, and they had lighted a fire under her and were melting her down before my eyes.

One night the skipper asked me if I would mind his leaving me in charge? "There's a German four-master, Chili to Hamburg with nitrates, gone ashore in Douarnenez Bay, near Brest," said he. "An' I must be lookin' out for another job, when this is done, d'ye see?"

Nothing happened whilst he was away. The weather moderated a little, and we were able to send another small barge-load of taxpayers' property ashore. The men were in perfectly good spirits, and after christening me "Captain How" and "Captain Why" they worked on as usual. I never gave an order, and they never asked for instructions, so that when the old man returned, five days later, he found us all as well pleased with each other as when he left.

"What of the wrecked German?" I asked him when we were in our cabin together that evening.

"No good. She's no good to us, Mr. Voogdt. She's

goin' to break up. The owners is trying to get prices to have her towed off, no cure no pay. That's no good to me. She's been knocked about too bad for patchin'. She'll never float again. Th' only thing to do is strip her, an' that they won't do. . . . I met a friend of yours in Brest, Mr. Voogdt."

"Who was that?" I knew only one person in Brest, and it was impossible that——

"That young woman you an' Smike took off th' *Aspasy*. Miss—Trimmings, did you say she was called? Some such name. I run right into her outside th' old castle at Brest—the place where the band plays, evenings. I knowed her face, but I couldn't call to mind where I'd seen her. I stared at her hard, and then she spoke to me. 'You're Cap'n Fletcher,' she says."

"In English?"

"In good English. Good as you or me, sir. That's how she gets her livin'. She's a teacher of English in Brest, so it stands to reason she ought to talk it pretty good. When she spoke I seen who it was. She asked me to remember her to you—she had your name, all right—and to Smike, though she didn't know his. 'To the giant man with white hair, and to Mr. Voogdt,' says she. She spoke very friendly of you, sir. A nice, pleasant-spoken young lady. 'He saved my life,' she says."

"Smike?"

"No, sir. You. 'He found me aboard, an' I should have been trampled to death if he hadn't found me,' she says. 'Tell him I think of him whenever I says my prayers,' says she. Very nice she said it. A pleasant-spoken young person, and good too, which the pleasant ones ain't always——"

The old man went maundering on as he undressed for bed—as much as he ever did undress at sea, that

is, which means that he took off his coat, trousers and boots, and rolled into his bunk in socks and full underclothing. But I didn't take much notice of his clothes just then, you may be sure. I was dumbfounded. That he should have run across her by chance like that, and that she, who had shown nothing but fear and a desire to avoid me only a week or two before, should have sent such a message! She had gone almost without a farewell, and remembering how she had behaved and knowing how little likelihood there was of my ever seeing her again, I had done my best to put her out of mind altogether. But this altered things entirely. Thanks to sheer luck I now knew where she was, and what she was doing. I could find her without difficulty—and she had sent me a message of goodwill.

I lit a pipe and was musing over it, when an ejaculation from the old man made me look up at him. He had his coat in one hand and in the other two or three slips of green paper, at which he was staring with a discomfited expression on his fat, good-natured face.

"What's the matter?"

"The fool of a fellow I am! Here've I been an' brought away all this French money—notes what I ought to have changed. Now I shall have them things on my hands for goodness knows how long. A hundred francs—that's four pounds. An' four more an' four more is twelve."

"You can change them next time you're in France."

"An' who knows when that'll be? Maybe not for months, an' as likely as not I shall have lost 'em by then. Twelve pounds, sir."

"Well, never mind, Cap'n. I'll change them for you. I can easily get English money for them when I get back to London."

"Ye can, sir? All right, then, an' thank ye. . . . Rum-lookin' stuff foreign money, ain't it? Why can't foreigners use the same bank notes as we do, I wonder? . . . Why! . . ."

"What's the matter?" I asked, holding out my hand.

"Here's a queer thing. For the minute, if I didn't think your name was printed on this note. A. V. double o—but 'tis only the number of the note. See ye here," and he put the slips into my hand.

I think I must have felt a stirring of memory, but took no notice of it. My mind was full of something else, as a matter of fact, and I scarcely heard what the old man was saying. So I just glanced at the numbers, nodded, said, "Queer. . . . I owe you twelve quid, skipper," and slipped the notes into my breast pocket.

Then all of a sudden I realized what I was doing. Out came the notes again, quick. Two of the numbers were quite different from the one that had been filled unconsciously in some back chamber of my mind, but the other was that very number—A.V. 00697.

At first I was positive it was that number I had seen on the list at Falmouth, but naturally, after two minutes of trying to ransack my memory, didn't feel so sure. None the less I was pretty certain that the numbers of one series of the notes stolen by Schofield had started with A.V. and two ciphers. Of course, there might be other notes of the same series still in circulation, but even so the coincidence seemed remarkable. As to the last numbers—6, 9, 7—they certainly had a sort of surface resemblance to G D T. At all events, try as I would, I could think of no other combination of numbers that would look as much like the last letters of my name. It was that very resemblance which had caught my eye at Falmouth when

first I glanced at the published numbers of the missing notes, and here old Fletcher had noticed the same peculiarity. Since the stolen notes were now at the bottom of the Channel in the wrecked *Aspasie*, it was obvious that if this one did bear an identical number with one of them, it was a forgery.

I looked up at the old man as he scrambled, puffing for breath, into the upper bunk.

"I believe one of these notes is a wrong un', Cap'n."

"Ye do? What makes ye think that?"

"This thing with a number that looks like my name. Queer you should have noticed that, for I noticed exactly the same thing in the papers when they published the numbers of the notes stolen by that chap Schofield, who was drowned on the *Aspasie*. I'm almost sure one of them was A.V. 00697, the same as this. There wouldn't be two notes with the same number, for certain, so if the numbers really are the same, this one must be a forgery."

"Ah well, sir, ye needn't pay me till ye get home, an' then ye can take it to the bank an' see. If it's all right, send on the money: if they won't change it, then serve me right for a fool. All foreigners is rogues, anyway." He pulled the blankets over his head, and, after a couple of reposeful grunts, almost immediately proceeded to snore. Evidently the matter didn't weigh much on his mind.

Next day we happened to be sending a barge-load more plunder ashore, and I volunteered to go with it in the tug to Bideford. When we arrived at the quayside, I left some lumpers getting the stuff out of the barge, and climbed the hill until I found a news-agent's shop. The woman in charge said she kept no old files of the papers she sold, but that she had a few bundles in her cellar tied up for return as unsold copies. I offered her a shilling for permission to

go through them, which, after doing her best to sound me for my intentions, she refused. She wasn't going to have her cellar made in a mess. The papers were tied up, and the place tidy, and I should make it in a fine old litter if I got opening her bundles. Then I did what I ought to have done at first—looked mysterious, and told her in strict confidence that I wanted a list of the stolen notes which Schofield had taken aboard the *Aspasie*.

The hint of mystery was quite enough to make an accomplice of her at once. She untied the bundles herself; found half a dozen copies of various papers giving the lists I wanted; pressed them all on me, and would take no payment. It was a righteous duty to help foil a rogue.

"And you won't say a word to a soul." I impressed that on her.

"Me! 's if I would do such a thing!" said she, and we parted on the best of terms, thanks to that little pretence of mystery.

She must have had two days of the most intense enjoyment retailing the story of my visit behind her hand to each of her neighbours in turn. I say two days, because on the third the skipper of the *Dauntless*, our Bideford tug, asked me what I wanted the list for, and the news of my visit must have been pretty stale by the time the men folk had heard of it.

The numbers were identical all right, so that Fletcher's note was obviously a forgery, but it was a very good copy. Comparing it with the other two, I could see no difference in them whatever, not even by using the object-glass of the old man's battered telescope as a magnifier. Of course, as I warned him, all three notes might be forgeries.

He used bad language about it, but said he would leave them with me, and take whatever I could get

for them. Later, happening to tell the story against himself, Frank the thrifty suggested that, since he had been deceived by it, perhaps the note would pass elsewhere.

"Why don't ye raffle it off, Cap'n? I'll put up a shillin'," said he.

Nearly all the others were willing to join in the gamble; but when old Charles Johns came back from the *Vedette* loaded up with tinned stores, and the suggestion was made to him, he refused to take a share.

"Why not?"

"I'll tell ye for why. Because ye can't cash the note without gettin' into trouble. Because I happen to know the French notes has all been salved from th' *Aspasy*, and sent to London. That's why."

"How do you know that?"

"My missus, she lives at Mullyon, an' they're all talkin' wreck, wreck, wreck till she's sick of it. An' so am I, for she can't keep it out of her letters. I gets enough o' wrecks——"

"Yes, yes. But what about the French notes, Cap'n Kettle?" chorussed the others.

"Ain't I tellin' you all about 'em? My missus, I had a letter from her when I went ashore yes'd'y, an' she says the notes has all been found, an' sent to the people in London what owns 'em."

"That's news, anyway, if it's true," said Charles Collis.

"True! What the —— d'ye mean? D'you mean to say my missus is a liar?" Charles Johns, peppery-tempered at the best, was very indignant. "You — you pup! Young enough to be my son, an' talks to me like that. 'Struth! You dare to call my missus a liar——"

"Keep cool, old Charles. Ginger for pluck, ever,"

shouted the free companions. "Punch Charles Collis on the nose. No, don't be cruel to him, you that's old enough to be his father. Slap the naughty boy, and send him to bed, and don't give him any supper——"

"What's all this?" said the old man, suddenly appearing on deck and beaming on the noisy rabble. "What's this, boys? Still skylarking, eh?"

"Collis said my missus was a liar," spluttered Charles Johns, his red beard jerking with indignation.

"Liar yourself," said Collis coolly. "I never said no such thing, sir. He said the French notes on the *Aspasy* was found, an' I said 'twas news, if true. Then the old waxwork flies out at me like that. I never said a word against his missus. All I meant was somebody might have told her a yarn, an' she believed it."

"That's enough," said Fletcher. "We can't have no quarrelling aboard, boys. If the tale's true, we shall hear all about it when we gets a newspaper aboard. An' if 't isn't, there's no harm done."

Charles Johns, grumbling, went back to the *Vedette*, and the squabble died a natural death. But when next day the tug brought off a local paper, two days old, we found that Mrs. Johns had not been misinformed. All the French notes, and most of the English ones, had been discovered by a diver in Bernard Schofield's cabin aboard the *Aspasie*, and sent to London to be delivered into the hands of the Official Receiver.

That was good news. There would be something substantial for the creditors. I thought of Jem and Pamela West, and their jolly little home at Castelnau, and when I went ashore next time sent them a wire of congratulation.

CHAPTER VII

BANK NOTE NO. A.V. 00697

OUR speculation turned out uncommonly well. We had a fine miscellaneous haul besides the propellers, and, as far as Fletcher could make out, had cleared rather over a hundred per cent. on our outlay in about a month. I asked him to let me hand back fifty pounds to be divided as a bonus among the crew, and, after standing them a dinner at the best hotel in Swansea, went to the station accompanied by the whole villainous gang, and left by the midnight train for London.

Almost the first call I paid after settling in at my old diggings was on the Wests, where I found them naturally very pleased about the recovery of the notes.

"How long have you been back in town?" Jem asked.

"Since early yesterday morning. Good news about those notes, eh? And that reminds me." I pulled out my pocket-book, and was showing him the list of stolen notes, and the three the old man had brought back from Brest, when his wife came in.

"What's that?" demanded she, all alive with curiosity in a moment.

"A forged French bank note,"—and I told them both the whole story.

"Let me look." She might have been own sister

to a town sparrow, so like an inquisitive bird was she. "Let me look. . . . How d'you know it's a forgery? . . . Really, how queer. Fancy its being the same number. . . . Are you sure these other two notes are all right? . . . I can't see any difference. I should try and pass it as a good one."

"Women haven't the first elementary notions of honesty."

"I don't care. I would. Then your friend Cap'n Fletcher wouldn't lose his four pounds. Let somebody else stand the racket rather than have a friend robbed. Them's my sentiments. I don't believe it is a forgery at all. Go and present it at the London office of the bank, Austin."

"And get arrested for trying to pass false notes."

"Well, show it to them, and say you aren't sure it's a good one. If they like to change it after that, it's their affair."

"And if they like to collar me on suspicion of being Schofield's accomplice, it's mine, I suppose? Be sure they've got the list of missing numbers off by heart."

"Then cut the number off," said she, and, taking up a pair of scissors from her chair, did so on the spot. "There you are. . . . Oh, I've spoilt your note."

"Never mind. Give me the corner you've cut off, and I'll keep it as a curiosity. I wonder what they would say, Jem?"

"Go and try," said James stolidly. "That's the only way to find out. We've finished the beer, Pam'ly, duckie. Is there any lunch?"

There was—another excellent lunch, now with no shadow of the Schofield business hanging over the table. At Pamela's suggestion, we decided to make holiday, and go up West to a matinee for the after-

noon, and after lunch set off in a taxi, more like three kids let out of school for a half-holiday than grown-ups. We were ten minutes early at Piccadilly Circus, and her ladyship announced that we were going to the Leicester Square office of the Banque de la République to cash Fletcher's notes.

The first two notes were cashed at once, but when I presented the third the cashier shook his head.

"We can't cash a note damaged like that, sir, unless you have the missing corner."

"I don't want it cashed," I told him. "I only want you to tell me if it's genuine."

He looked at it pretty hard, and then took it to an older man at a desk in the rear of the office. After a short conversation this older man came forward with the note in his hand, and I repeated my question: "Is it a genuine note?"

"It appears to be," said he. "I have no reason to doubt it."

"We have every reason," Pamela cut in. "In fact we are pretty well sure it's a forgery. Now what do you say?"

"I can only repeat what I have said already, Madame." The elderly cashier was inclined to be stiff about it. "It has every appearance of a genuine note. If you have good reason for believing it to be a forgery, we shall be much obliged if you will leave it in our hands for a day or so, when we will let you have an authentic report."

"All right," I said. "I'll leave it." I left my name and address as well, and off we went to our matinée.

Next day came a note from the bank. Could I supply them with the missing corner of the note, or let them know its number? No, I couldn't. I made that very clear. Their questioning made me a little

anxious, for I was thinking of running over to the North of France for a holiday—Normandy, or perhaps Brittany—and I didn't want to be detained in London by any law bother about this precious note.

Two days later came another letter from the bank enclosing the damaged note. Their expert had reported that the note was unquestionably genuine, and if I would produce the missing corner, or could assure them that it had been accidentally destroyed, they would have pleasure in handing me cash for the amount.

Off I went to Castelnau at once, and laid the letter and note before the Wests. Jem West for once had an opinion to give about it.

"It's quite obvious what has happened. Some of the notes had got into circulation before Schofield skipped his job. Most likely he'd cashed them himself before he left—of course making no entry of the transaction. And all notes missing from the bank would be published as being taken away by him, whether he'd cashed them before or no."

I admit his theory looked like sense, and so said nothing, but Madame Pamela wasn't content with so simple an explanation.

"Where did your friend get the note?" she asked.

"In Brest."

"That's in Brittany, isn't it? Well, if I were you, Austin, I should go over there with your list of the missing notes, and see if you can get some more with the published numbers. Where you find one, you may find others. You clever old thing, Jemmy"—she rumbled his hair—"I'm sure you're right. Perhaps there are quite a lot of the missing notes over there, and if you find some they may throw light on that poor wretch's doings before he went to his death——"

"But, girl dear, you're sending Austin on a wild-goose chase," interrupted Jem.

"I don't see that at all," I said quickly. "I don't see it's so much of a wild-goose chase. Fact is, I—well, I've had it in mind lately to take a holiday in the North of France. Very interesting place. Lots of Druidical monuments to see—the stone avenues at Karnac, and so on. There are pretty little watering-places there, and some fine old cathedrals. Brest, too—interesting place, Brest. Naval port, and so on."

"Why? Why, what's taken you, Austin?" Jem West was staring at me with his mouth open. "Why, when we were there two years ago, you said Brest was a hole—the last place ever made, and that its maker was dead tired before he started on it, and had run out of decent materials as well. And now you talk of going to that very place for a holiday—in search of watering-places and stone avenues and cathedrals—and stolen French bank notes. Just because your pal Fletcher picks up one note over there, you don't expect to find Schofield's plunder blowing about stone avenues or the streets of cathedral towns, do you? He may have cashed one or two notes, but the bulk of the stuff is here in the Official Receiver's hands."

"You talk foolishly, James," I told him. "Your wife and myself are agreed that I might trace a note or two, and that's all we expect to do. Where one has been found, others may possibly occur. I think it's a very sensible thing to do."

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE AND BANK NOTES

BY the time I had been three days in Brest, I had come to my old conclusion—that the place was a hole. A modern town with straight, uninteresting streets, even its slums lack any particular distinction. The Revolution swept away all the buildings of interest except the castle, and a man can't hang around one Norman castle for days on end without getting very bored. I must have sat in the Place du Château—where the band plays—for six hours a day, staring at those rubble walls till I was sick of the sight of them. The food in the small local cafés was execrable, and the only thing fit to drink was cider. The reputed better-class wine of the country is Anjou Mousseux—filthy, sweet, bubbly stuff, not fit for pigs. It was very dull indeed, sitting in that square day after day, and the garrison band, so far from being any entertainment, was a maddening nuisance, being a very inferior tinny-toned and provincial article.

Nothing had come of my investigations into the matter of the French notes. Being bored, perhaps I had got a little slack. As a matter of fact, only two hundred-franc notes had chanced into my hands so far; and when, on the morning of my fourth day in Brest, I took my accustomed seat near the bandstand—where one got an excellent view of the fine old castle—it suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't compared their numbers with my list. Searching my pockets, I

found I had actually cashed one of them without noting the number at all, and the one I had left didn't tally with any number on the list, so that I had really wasted three whole days and done nothing.

I had just put the note and list back into my pocket, and for about the hundredth time resumed my inspection of the fine old Norman castle, when I fancied I recognized a familiar figure crossing the square. It so chanced that my seat, in addition to facing the castle, commanded a view of four of the six roads which led into the square, and the girl's figure I thought I recognized was walking across from one of these streets to that opposite it. I was on my feet in a moment; caught the girl up at the corner of the square; and, sure enough, as I had imagined, it proved to be Miss Trimen.

I was alongside of her, and spoke, before she saw me.

"Miss Trimen, have you forgotten me?" I said, rather anxiously, for I remembered how we had parted, and feared she might think this accidental meeting was intentional, and so an intrusion.

I need not have worried. Her face gladdened me. There was no fear in it now: nothing but open friendliness, and I forgot my boredom in a moment.

"Mr. Voogdt," she said, her voice lifting with what sounded uncommonly like pleased surprise. Out came her hand. "I am glad to see you." It was impossible not to believe she meant it. "I am glad to see you. What are you doing in Brest?"

"Holidaying. Just holidaying," I told her. "I'm fond of Brittany and your dear simple people here, and I often run over when I've got time. I'm glad to see you, too, Miss Trimen. I never imagined we should chance to meet like this."

"Nor did I. Indeed I am glad! Where are you staying?"

"At the Continental. Are—are you living in Brest?" I was nervous about asking her address again.

"Yes. I am in lodgings—No. 28, Rue S. Mathieu. Let me give you my card." She opened her little bag, and fumbled for her card-case, whilst I wondered at the change in her. Her being in lodgings explained why her name wasn't in the Directory. I should say that the *Brest Directory* was about the only thing I could find to read at the Continental—except the daily papers and journals and things like that, of course—and I had glanced through it idly once or twice wondering whether I should chance on her address.

"Here's the card. I do hope I shall see you again, Mr. Voogdt."

"Oh, we're sure to meet. I'm staying for a long time—that is to say, a good while—a week or two, for certain. May I call?"

"Do," said she. I might have been an old and trusted friend, she gave the invitation so frankly and readily. "Yes, do. I'm always at home from four till six in the evening. I'll give you tea—a rare luxury in France, isn't it?"

"That's awfully good of you. I miss my afternoon tea awfully here. When may I come?"

"Whenever you please, if you'll only let me know beforehand."

"Will to-morrow do?"

"To-morrow will do admirably."

"At four o'clock?"

"As soon after four as you please. I shall expect you. Twenty-eight, Rue S. Mathieu, remember. Now I must hurry. I've got a pupil waiting for me. Good-

bye. Good-bye—*Au revoir*, I mean," and with another smile and a wave of the hand she was gone, and I was walking back to my seat in the Place du Château.

I always think they're charming places, those old French squares with their garden beds and trees and the dappled sunlight shining through the leaves on to their cobbled pavements. I sat for a while with my back to the castle—I was getting tired of the castle, I admit, though it's a fine old building—and watched the children climbing about the seats and the fountain by the bandstand. Then as the luncheon hour drew on, the little cafés round the square began to push their neat white-covered tables out across the broad clean pavements, and the band came out and played—and played very well, too, considering they were only from a provincial garrison. And everything and everybody seemed gay and jolly—very different from the dull life of a provincial English town.

I lunched at one of the little cafés in the open air, under the shade of the trees, and enjoyed my meal thoroughly. Madame the landlady was like a mother to me. She had seen me seated in the square for the last three days, she said, and thought I looked melancholy.

"Day by day, Monsieur, you sit in regarding the ancient castle with an air of the most triste, so that I figure to myself that you reflect upon the wickedness of the *ancien régime*, and the cruelties ineffable that have been done behind those walls so bad. *Eh bien*, the days are better now, Monsieur will agree."

I did agree. Things were better now. That black-guard old régime had passed for good, and Madame's good humour was infectious. I drank a whole bottle of Anjou Mousseux—capital stuff. A little sweet, perhaps, but in my opinion dry wines may be over-

rated. At all events, this bottle was excellent—a drink worthy of the old Angevin kings themselves. After a leisurely lunch, I bade farewell to *Madame la patronne* with an interchange of bows and smiles, and mutual flowery compliments, and spent the afternoon walking on the ramps over the harbour, shaded by the dignified tall houses built after the Revolution had swept away the squalid tortuous roads of the old town. The prospect here is superb—one of the finest harbour views in Europe. Only Plymouth or Marseilles comes near it, to my thinking, and I walked up and down the walled ramps, pipe in mouth, and with a heart at peace with the world. Curiously, every hour of that day sticks in my mind to this, and yet there was really nothing to record except that chance meeting with Miss Trimen. But I felt especially cheerful and contented, and as that's an unusual frame of mind for me when I'm idling, I suppose it impressed itself on my memory.

Changing for dinner that evening, I pulled out the bank note and list of numbers I had crammed carelessly into my pocket in the morning, and it occurred to me that I had better begin to set to work in earnest to acquire other notes to compare with the list. So after dinner I went to the hotel bureau, and changed an English twenty-pound note for five French ones of a hundred francs each. Then I went for a stroll down the principal street, and at the café I had been using for the last three days ordered a drink and a cigar, and then, announcing that I had no small change, proffered another English twenty in payment.

The waiter boggled over it a bit, and eventually at my request called the proprietor. I introduced myself with an air, told him I was an English visitor staying at the Continental, and offered to leave the note with

him till the morning if he had any doubts of it or of me. That settled it. With bows and smiles and more compliments, he produced the change, four more hundred-franc notes, and a handful of coin. I invited him to join me in a coffee and cognac, stood him a cigar, gave the waiter a whole franc for himself—whereat he appeared desirous of dusting my boots with his napkin—and when I went left an atmosphere of goodwill to all men behind me. Then I went to another café, and changed a fiver—too many twenty-pound notes seemed likely to excite remark in this country town—and finally got home with ten notes of a hundred francs each in my pocket.

I may as well confess at once that I never believed the A. V. 00697 note was genuine. In those days of photozincography any note can be copied exactly providing the paper and watermark are right, and I thought cutting off the numbered corner had possibly removed some important evidence of authenticity, such as the over-printing of the number, say. If all the engravers in the world had sworn to the thing without seeing the number, I should still have reserved my opinion.

None the less, Jem West's theory was worthy of consideration. Schofield might certainly have passed out a note or two before he absconded. Nothing was more likely. This being so, it was obvious the note would soon get to France, where it was good currency. Then there was nothing to prevent its drifting into this country district, and so getting into Fletcher's hands, though it was certainly rather a strange coincidence that it should have come into the possession of a man who was on the spot when Schofield had come to his death. But that such a coincidence could happen twice was against nature—against all the rules of

chance—which are rules as mathematically certain as the laws that rule the universe.

So it was in a very perfunctory way that I set about examining my ten notes. I remember perfectly well going through my pockets, putting the silver and bronze coins into separate heaps on the dressing-table, one or two louis into my sovereign purse, and the notes in a crumpled wad on the looking-glass stand. Then I hung up my coat, wound my watch, and sat down at the dressing-table to investigate the numbers. So careless was I that I found I had left the list in my coat pocket, and had to get up, yawning, to fetch it from the wardrobe. . . .

I have never had such a shock in my life. Three of those notes had numbers which tallied with the Schofield list !

I leant back in my chair, and stared at my own face in the looking-glass, and I remember, even now, that my mouth was open and I looked like a fool. . . .

Then I went over the notes again, letter by letter and number by number. But not all the checking in the world could make any difference. Three notes out of ten—thirty per cent. of the change I had taken that evening—bore numbers that were repeated in the list before me.

The very first note I had picked up had been shock number one, and I had gone through the others too quickly to appreciate the magnitude of the thing at first. The third was the next on the list, and, with my brain numbed by the surprise, I half expected all the others to tally as well. The fourth, no. The fifth, no. The sixth, no ; and I began to breathe again. After finding that third note on the list—if anyone had told me I was Schofield himself, counting

out his plunder, I shouldn't have had the wits or breath to contradict him——

The seventh, no. The eighth, no. The ninth—O Lord! Yes. The tenth, no. The first, the third, and the ninth were notes with the published numbers.

And then it was that I stared in the looking-glass, and subconsciously noted that I looked a fool.

And I felt like a fool, too—like an imbecile. I was knocked so staring silly with the surprise of the thing, that I literally couldn't think. All I could do was to drum with the tips of my fingers on the dressing-table, and stare first at the looking-glass, and then at the notes. Again and again I picked them up; stared at them, front and back; held them up to the light to look at the watermarks; and then put them down, and resumed staring at myself in the looking-glass, and beating the devil's tattoo on the dressing-table with my finger-tips.

Thirty per cent. Three notes out of every ten in the city of Brest. What was the population and average wealth per head of the people of Brest? I was in such an imbecile state that I actually began to try and get at the size of the thing that way. Started to do it like a sum. If three notes in every ten in the city of Brest were—. And then I saw how impossible it was, and that I was making a fool of myself.

Yet the one stunning fact lay before me. I had in one evening got ten hundred-franc notes in ordinary change—here they were in my hands. And of these ten notes, the numbers of three had been published in England as stolen by Schofield, sunk on the *Aspasie*, and recovered and placed in the Official Receiver's hands. And they weren't in his hands. They were in mine.

As my brain began to recover from the shock, I

made some attempt to marshal my facts and make conjectures that would come anywhere near them. The outstanding facts were that Schofield had bolted with certain notes. These notes were known, and their numbers published. Schofield hadn't got away with this plunder. He was drowned, and the plunder was in the Official Receiver's hands.

Yet some of that money was here, in my possession. How had the leakage occurred? As Jem West had suggested, some of the notes—perhaps a good many—might have been put into circulation before Schofield absconded. That was quite possible—even probable. Then, again, he might have changed some more aboard the *Aspasie* after he embarked on her at Plymouth. Nothing impossible about that. He was aboard four hours, and he might have dined well, or been playing cards—or for that matter might have gone straight to the purser when he embarked, and changed quite a large quantity at once. Try as I would, I couldn't see how else he could have got rid of them after he had once started his flight. To have changed French notes in London would have been sure to attract notice—the very last thing an absconding banker would want to do. No, unless the notes were forgeries, accidentally bearing the numbers of some of those he had stolen, they must have been put into circulation by him either before his flight, or during that four hours aboard the ill-fated *Aspasie*. So much seemed certain.

But, granting this conjecture right, I was faced with a question even more baffling. How did the notes come to Brest in such quantities? Fletcher, who had been here two days at most, had brought away one with him, whilst I, in a single evening, had got three! That was unanswerable. By what possible chance could the notes have come to this remote French country

town? I said to myself again and again: "But it's impossible. The notes are in the Receiver's hands. They can't be here." I said it even whilst I held and stared at the impossible things.

Arguing in a circle, round and round again, I could come to no conclusion whatever except the one I had reached when I identified the number of Fletcher's note. They must be forgeries. It seemed the only way out of the difficulty, and I began to try and see the extent of the thing. If I was able in one evening to spot thirty per cent. of my takings as forgeries, France was in for a scandal compared to which the *affaire Humbert* and the *affaire Dreyfus* would be mere flea-bites. Strange, if poor Schofield's death had led to such a discovery as this. Knowing the keen interest of the French peasant in affairs of State, and his far keener interest in affairs of money, I could see red war coming out of this. Let but a feeling of insecurity be aroused, followed by a run on Government securities; let the peasant once believe himself swindled out of 5 per cent. of his savings—leave alone 30 per cent.—and there would be a Revolution. And quick, too. *A bas les bourgeois* is always pretty near the lips in France—and 30 per cent. of forged Government paper would make an Eskimo see red, leave alone a French farmer. In those harmless-looking slips of crumpled paper on my dressing-table was dynamite enough for an explosion that would echo far beyond sleepy Brest. It would blow sky-high the strongest Government ever elected, and wreck palaces in the Champs Elysées as well as cottage homes all over France. Let France but know what these notes had told me, and in a week plump gentlemen, authorities on high finance, would be dragged from their houses by the mob and murdered in the Paris streets.

There were only two people in the world I could trust with such knowledge as that. I wrote to Jem West telling him to show the letter and notes to his wife. They were to compare the numbers with the Schofield list, mutilate them as we had mutilated Fletcher's note, and take them to the London office of the Banque as before. "Tell them this time that you are positive the notes are forgeries," I wrote, "and when they confirm you, as they must, ask to be shown any features which distinguish them from genuine notes. Then I shall know what to look for in future."

Badly scared though I was, I couldn't resist adding a postscript for Pamela's benefit. "Tell the missus that Mademoiselle Mathilde is going strong"; and then I enclosed the notes, sealed the envelope, and took good care to put it under my pillow when I went to bed.

CHAPTER IX

SURPRISES MULTIPLY

IF I started the next day in a preoccupied frame of mind, I finished it almost in a lunatic condition. That quiet provincial town of Brest and the sleepy country-side around it provided a series of shocks that pretty nearly brought me to a state of nervous breakdown.

Having registered and posted my letter the first thing in the morning, I had nothing to do until I paid my promised visit to Miss Trimen in the afternoon, so made up my mind to take a quiet day in the country and try to evolve some theory that would explain the presence of those confounded notes. I wasn't hunting for any more of them just then, thank you! Those three had given me a bad shock, and looking for others at present seemed a little too much like searching in a powder-magazine with a naked light. Even the seven I had on me felt as though they would burn a hole in my pocket, so I made up my mind to get rid of them, and went down to Cook's agency to change them for English money—five five-pound notes, and a sovereign or two. I was so nervous about them that it was quite a relief when the cashier took them without remark. If he had asked a single question, I think I should have run away out of the office—and if I had felt sure they were forgeries I would have burnt them myself rather than try to pass them into circulation again.

On leaving Cook's office I took the steam-tram to

Le Conquet, had a swim, and set out to walk a mile or two on the homeward road before lunch. Walking stimulates thought, but it didn't help me much this time, for the more I racked my brains the more I found myself up against a problem to all appearance insoluble.

If I assumed the notes were genuine, how had they got to Brest? Try as I would, that question baffled me. If they were forgeries—if forged notes were circulating throughout France in such large quantities as that—then France was in for another financial *débâcle*. But I could see no other way out of it: the forgery proposition appeared to be the only solution which would meet the case. No matter what notes Schofield had put into circulation, it was unthinkable that four of them should be discovered in this one remote country place in one month—three of them in one evening.

I lunched at a wayside house in a little hamlet called Kerambosquer, and after lunch, having half an hour to wait for the tram, sat down on the cliffs beside a clump of yellow-blossomed furze bushes where I could overlook the sea, and there I thought and worried and puzzled over the matter until my head ached. Point by point I checked over my facts, but still could see no way out of the maze. Could the list be wrong? That might be a solution good enough to account for the discovery of one note—but four? No, I rejected that. Could Schofield himself have visited Brest, and got rid of a large number of the notes before his final flight? That didn't seem impossible; but since his death his doings had been so carefully investigated that one could scarcely believe such a suspicious event as a visit to France could have escaped observation. Musing, I almost unconsciously pulled out my pocket-

book to scan the list again. The English five-pound notes I had got at Cook's office in the morning lay in the wallet with the list, and I pulled notes and list out together, holding the wad of paper in my left hand.

A light breeze, loaded with the peach-smell of the furze blossom, fluttered the flimsy papers, and I smoothed them flat with my other hand—and as I did so my right thumb and forefinger pointed to the same number, repeated on a bank note and on the last column of the list—the column containing the numbers of the English notes stolen by Bernard Schofield! The topmost of the five I had obtained at Cook's that morning—an ordinary five-pound Bank of England note, as familiar in appearance as the Union Jack—was another of the notes which all the world believed to be stolen by Schofield, salvaged from the *Aspasie*, and now in the possession of the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy for the City of London! What could any man in his sane senses make of that?

I'm not saying I was sane, or sober, because I wasn't. I was stunned—knocked sick and silly. I felt as if I were dreaming—in some silly nightmare where all sorts of impossible things happened. Remember, I'd had the shock of my life scarcely twelve hours before—such a shock that I had put in half a day flogging my brains in the vain endeavour to make its facts square with any sort of probability whatever. And the only theory I could attempt to set up meant a reign of terror, pretty well. Walking along the cliff road, deep in thought, I had only half-consciously observed the things about me—the sea, the furze blossom glowing like fire on the white cliffs, the Breton peasants working busy as ants upon their little farms—but whenever I had passed the time of day with man or woman, the thought had been in my mind that if I were right

in my conjectures I was going to drop a bombshell on the peaceful country-side that would turn these kindly peasants into a mob of howling wild beasts.

But if the forgery idea was a bombshell, here was another in this thin paper now fluttering in my hand—a bombshell which blew my own theories about my ears. It literally knocked the breath out of me: as I stared at the thing I panted like a man running. It must have been ten minutes or more before I could begin to try and puzzle out what possible explanation could meet the new circumstances of the case.

I didn't puzzle long. One thing was obvious: Schofield or an agent of his must have been at Brest. To suggest that this note was a forgery was palpably absurd, and consequently the other notes might be, and probably were, perfectly genuine. So my imagined Revolution wouldn't come off, and the financiers of Paris and peasants of Brittany could breathe again.

That was it, for certain. I gave up wondering about it. If anything on earth were certain, it was certain now that Schofield had shed some of his plunder here before absconding. The only question was how much had he got rid of? Was that bundle taken from his cabin depleted to any great extent? Because, if so, it might be a serious matter for the creditors. I resolved to send the note along to Jem West at once, and warn him to be prepared for a disappointment in the event of the money recovered from the wreck not amounting to as much as was expected, and then, the tram coming along, I pocketed the notes and list, put the whole thing out of my mind, and went back to Brest for tea.

No. 28, Rue St. Mathieu, proved to be the usual sort of apartment house, let off in floors to various tenants. It was in a pleasant wide street, apparently occupied

by well-to-do bourgeoisie, the little iron balconies outside its windows gay with flowers and striped awnings. The concierge directed me to the second floor, where I discovered, from a brass plate on the landing, that Mademoiselle Trimen lived with some people called Auffret. A fat, country-bred maid, her face one grin of good-nature, took my hat and stick, and ushered me into a roomy *salon*, where Miss Trimen was sitting with another woman, presumably her hostess, or landlady. Naturally, I didn't know on what terms she was living with the Auffrets.

She rose, and greeted me with a smile in her open, friendly way, showing no sign of embarrassment beyond a faint flush, which, as likely as not, was due to reflection from the shaded and flower-decked window. After shaking hands, she introduced me to Madame Auffret, a plump, pretty little woman, with a high colour, and those magnificent black-fringed grey eyes one only finds in Cornwall or Brittany.

She—Madame—declared herself enchanted to meet me. Mademoiselle had spoken to her often, often, of the shipwreck, so terrible, and of the gallantry of the redoubtable *Britannic* sailors. With a woman's desire to wade in horrors, she wanted me to sit down at once and tell the story of the *Aspasie* over again for her benefit.

In presenting me to her hostess, Miss Trimen had stepped back a pace, so that it was only by accident I caught sight of her face in profile in a mirror over Madame's shoulder. It looked like a head of Medusa, so lovely was it and so full of horror. It scared me. Just as I had seen hope give way to fear in her eyes aboard the *Godwit*, so, now, her friendly smile had vanished, and her face was a mask of pain and terror. Not all the rosy light from the window could give her

a flush now, for she was as pale as ashes. So great and so evident was her fear that I felt ashamed, as though with that accidental glance into the mirror I had forced myself into her confidence, and was staring at her naked shrinking soul.

It was only a moment's glance, and neither woman noticed it. I edged round so as to come between Madame Auffret and the girl, and began talking volubly, explaining at length my reasons for desiring not to speak of the disaster. Even now, I assured the little lady, the painful incidents of the wreck were too fresh in my mind for discussion. Madame would, I felt sure, understand one's reluctance to discourse upon an affair so terrible.

Blundering on, I piled up the agony, so that if Madame Auffret chanced to catch sight of the girl's face she might think something I had said accounted for her pallor, and, after dragging out my prevarications as long as possible, said I felt sure that Mademoiselle, too, would rather we talked about something else, and turned to her for corroboration. By that time she had recovered a little, and I thought I read gratitude in her troubled face.

"Monsieur Voogdt speaks truly," she said, with a little gulp. "For me, Madame, believe me when I say the history of the wreck is still too painful. Let us talk of things more pleasant."

Little Madame Auffret was apologetic at once, and with the arrival of tea—"le fivoclock," as she called it with pride—we got on to less grisly subjects. With a view to giving Miss Trimen a chance of keeping out of the conversation for a while—and, perhaps, in the hope of drawing similar confidences from her later on—I gave them a pretty complete biography of myself.

During the subsequent conversation I gathered that

Miss Trimen, though Breton, was not a Brestoise. She had lived in the country until the death of her father, a small proprietor near Caen, and had then come into the town to make a living by teaching English. Madame Auffret had been one of her first pupils, and, learning that she was in want of decent lodgings, had jumped at the idea of having her in her own house. Her husband was on the Western Railway of France in some clerical capacity, and, having the idea that a knowledge of English would lead to quicker promotion, he and his wife hoped to learn the quicker by having Miss Trimen as their guest. She had been at school in England, she told me—somewhere near the New Forest ; but she didn't give me the name of the place, and I couldn't well ask her the question direct. Also, for a Frenchwoman, she had travelled a good deal. She knew Germany and the Low Countries, had visited Spain and Italy, and once had even crossed the Mediterranean to Algiers. When she had recovered sufficiently to take a fair share of the talk, I found it very pleasant, sitting and taking tea with her and her pretty little hostess.

The ice once broken, Madame insisted on our speaking English, and now and again would make a plucky endeavour to sustain her part in the conversation. As her knowledge of English seemed to be confined to half a dozen idioms, such as "oah yess," and "I sssay," her contributions were not intrusive, and Miss Trimen and I did most of the talking.

As she became more at ease, she talked well. She was witty, she was kind : there was that double pleasantness about her that, when she was amusing, it was at no one else's expense. She could appreciate different ways of thinking : born in France and schooled in England, she was not only bilingual, but had two sides

to her head. With the broader English way of looking at things she combined the Frenchwoman's interest in minute details, and for all her brains and experience she was just girl—a young female animal that laughed, that loved laughter and flowers and sunshine, and had not yet outgrown her kinship with babies and puppies and kittens, and all such chubby, fluffy things. And as I began to learn the sweet and kindly nature of her, so I began to understand her pain and horror at the remembrance of that ghastly wreck. What could her mind conceive to prepare her for a shock like that?—little murdered children stamped under water to be drowned by those panic-stricken beasts of emigrants. What wonder she was terrified at the memory of such a business? It must have been branded on her heart as though with white-hot irons. Pah! I didn't like remembering it myself; and what must it mean to her?

She spoke now of her daily life and the friends about her, praising Madame Auffret highly for her kindness and good-nature.

"Not many Frenchwomen would approve of your calling on me in this manner, would they? But Madame understands that it is the English way. Is it not so, Madame?" She translated swiftly into French for the little lady's benefit, and Madame smiled, and said, "Oah, yess, Mees," with great appropriateness.

She spoke so frankly of the visit, without a trace of mincing or affectation, that I thought I might venture to push matters further.

"Would she object to your showing me about the country-side?" I asked. "I'm all alone here. I don't know the district well, and it would be a real kindness if you would act as a guide sometimes. Will you?"

"With pleasure," she said, as frankly as before.

"If it weren't for you, I shouldn't be alive at this moment. If I can be of any use whatever——"

"Don't put it like that, Miss Trimen," I told her. "If you would like to come, you would add very much to my enjoyment. But I can't let you merely because you think you owe it to me as a duty."

"It will be a pleasure as well as a duty, Mr. Voogdt. I only mentioned my debt to you because I want you to remember I always have it in my own mind. I owe you my life——"

"Pure nonsense," I said. "And please, since I may count on your good will, please don't mention it again. Now, when are we going to take our first walk?"

It appeared that she was free on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays—three days a week. That was better than I expected. To-day was Tuesday, and I asked her if she would like to make an excursion for the following Thursday. She was agreeable, and we planned to go to Point St. Mathieu for the day. Madame Auffret, consulted, declared herself delighted at the idea of joining us, and, after a very pleasant hour, I took my leave, and went back to the Continental feeling very pleased with myself, indeed.

After dinner I got a copy of the *Brest Touriste*, and looked out the route to Point St. Mathieu, discovering that we went by the Le Conquet tram as far as the Kervenor stop, walking thence over the cliff-lands via Plougonvelin. The tram route reminded me of my shock of the morning—meeting Miss Trimen, and the events of tea-time, had almost put the matter out of my head—and I wrote Jem West, enclosed the note, and went out to post it. Walking back from the post office, it struck me I would take my coffee at the café where I had changed my twenty-pound note the night before. My friend the waiter, anticipating another

whole franc as a tip, left the rest of his clientèle, and transferred his entire attention to me.

"Coffee?"—"Mais certainement, Monsieur." "And a pousse-café?"—"Mais certainement. Monsieur désire voir *le Journal*, sans doute? *Journal de Brest*? Paraissant tous les mardis et vendredis." With a flourish he handed me the Tuesday edition, and flipped off to get the coffee and cognac.

Glancing over the paper, I looked at it more from the professional standpoint than as a reader. It was the usual French provincial rag, abominably printed, with garrison orders and matters of local interest well to the fore, and with its foreign news supplied by the *Agence Havas*, two days old, and with the proper names comically misspelt. I paid more attention to the get-up of the thing than to the news it contained, and when the waiter arrived was just putting it down to take up my coffee cup, when I caught sight of a cross heading tucked away at the bottom of a column, which riveted my attention at once:

"L'AFFAIRE SHCOFIELD—ECHO DU NAUFRAGE DE
L'ASPASIE."

It was a very short paragraph, but it supplied shock number three—the third in twenty-four hours. If this rag was to be believed, three more of the English notes taken by Schofeild (they spelt his name Schofeild this time, presumably hoping to get it right one way or another), three of the notes listed as part of his plunder, had come to light in a bank at Plymouth!

That was all. Just the bare statement that the notes had been discovered by a cashier in the Plymouth office of a bank. It didn't give the name of the bank or the numbers of the notes, but what it did give was

enough to make me forget the coffee on the table before me till it was stone-cold.

Like a man in a dream, I ordered another cup, and for fear lest I should forget this one too, gulped at it, scalded my mouth, and swore under my breath. Then I leant back in my chair, chewed my cigar, and tried to think—to think—to think.

I couldn't. Sequent thought was impossible. As well expect a man pelted with stones to give a geological lecture on the origin of each of them. My mind wouldn't work. All I could do was stare at the people passing by—soldiers ; picturesque navy men in striped shirts, with red pompons on their caps ; country folk in town for the evening, the men in embroidered waistcoats and the women in white caps—a different pattern from each village. My mind wasn't under control. It would not be pinned down any more to this ridiculous problem that led nowhere and was constantly changing in form. I found myself wondering why the French Navy had adopted the *Pompon rouge* as its distinguishing badge, and why a peasant woman from Quimper wore a flat linen bow on her head and another from Lambezellec a winged monstrosity like a Beguin nun's ? I could not fix my thoughts any longer on Schofield and his infernal notes : my mind was wearied of the subject, and sought to be exercised in some other way, and after a struggle to centre it on this announcement from Plymouth, I gave up the attempt altogether, and sat lazily smoking and observing the passing crowd with a casual interest that was restful in itself.

After all, what was the good of bothering about it ? No sooner had one painfully and patiently conjectured at a possible answer to the problem, than some other fact was slammed down on the table, and every theory

already made knocked endways. I finished my coffee and cigar at leisure, strolled home, and went to bed.

But after two hours' sleep, I woke with my rested brain doing a bit of worrying on its own account, independent of my volition. It worked automatically, ranging the facts one by one. Schofield had absconded with certain moneys. That money had been taken from the wreck of the *Aspasie* and sent to London, and now some of it—four French notes and four English ones—had been discovered at Plymouth and Brest. The solution was perfectly simple. Because the facts had been presented to me one by one I had muddled myself by theorizing about each of them in turn instead of waiting till all the cards were on the table. Now, after sleep, my brain was clear, and the muddle had departed. If the facts had all been laid before me at once, there would have been no muddle at all. It was patent to anyone what had happened. Some clerk in the Official Receiver's office was helping himself to the recovered notes, and my plain duty was to telegraph that official in the morning, and tell him so, thus stopping any further depredations.

One more question remained unanswered. How had the notes, stolen in London, reached remote country towns like Plymouth and Brest? Even to that the answer came pat: the thief didn't dare cash the notes in London, so took them to Plymouth, a remote but busy garrison town, where they would be likely to pass for a while without giving rise to remark. As to Brest—wasn't there a daily steamer service between Plymouth and Brest? It was as plain as a pikestaff what had happened. At last I had dropped upon the correct solution; and I turned over, and went to sleep again in peace, resolving to wire the Official Receiver first thing next morning.

CHAPTER X

AN INTERRUPTED LUNCHEON

BURNING August heat had scorched Finistère for days, and when I woke next morning the clouds were building up slowly over Brest, and my room was airless, heavy with the promise of a thunderstorm. While I was dressing, Miss Trimen came into my mind, and, wondering what she would think of all this bank-note business, I conceived a sudden distaste of it myself.

I readily admit that unsatisfied curiosity is a thorn in my flesh. I hate the instinct : it reduces a man to the level of a ferret sometimes, but after all, if it weren't for ferrets a lot of unwholesome vermin would lay up in holes in safety. I like things to be definite, open, and aboveboard, and prefer plain speaking, plain straightforward thinking, wherever possible. I hate vagueness, inaccuracy, and slovenly statements with fuzzy edges to them, and very heartily dislike the British habit of covering up unpleasant things and assuming they're not there. If a thing's good, why cover it up ? If it's bad, set it in open air and sunlight, and it'll improve or die. What use in slurring it over ? Where things are dark and mysterious, there's generally something wrong : some lack of health in body, some poor perverted mind. Only nasty or sickly things can flourish in a half-light.

And yet this morning, with that girl in my mind, I couldn't help wondering what she would think of my

proposed action in wiring the Official Receiver. Somewhere at the other end, that telegram would materialize into a heavy hand, laid on the shoulder of some poor thief in the Receiver's office. I wondered what sort of looking chap he was? Perhaps he had a wife and kids, and a little home at Balham, or East Sheen, or Tooting, or some such place. Perhaps they were even now seeing him off to business, one of the stream of humanity which flows in and out of the City every day. And this evening his meal would be on the table and his wife waiting, and the kids sitting up to see daddy before they went to bed, and wondering why he was late. . . . Suppose all that was told to Miss Trimen, and she looked straight at me with those calm eyes of hers, and said: "What business was it of yours, Mr. Voogdt?" How the deuce could I answer her?

I had to make a conscious effort to pull myself together. It was this oppressive heat, and the thunder in the air; they were making me morbid. A man was thieving—and robbing Jem and Pamela West, too—(I impressed that on myself very clearly)—and it was a matter of plain duty to stop him, even though I wrecked every home in suburban London. Making up my mind to send the wire, I finished dressing, and went downstairs in the sweltering heat to breakfast.

Some English visitors were at the next table, and I gleaned from their conversation that they had just come ashore from the *Antelope*, having left Plymouth the night before. It struck me I might as well make sure of the name of the bank where the notes had been found, before wiring the Official Receiver, so I went to their table, and asked if either of them by any chance had a copy of a Plymouth paper?

No. None of them had. But one man suggested

that I might get one aboard the *Antelope*; so, before going to the post office, I sauntered down the ramps to the "Bassin de Commerce," and went aboard the steamer. One of the stewards had a copy of yesterday's *Western Morning Mail*, which, he said, I was welcome to take, and I climbed the ramps again, sat down under a tree, and searched the paper end for end for any mention of the business.

Once I went through the headlines; and twice, with the same result. Then I read the small paragraphs of local interest, and then ran through all the headlines again; and not one mention of Schofield, or the *Aspasie*, or stolen notes, could I find anywhere.

Rather inclined to sneer at English provincial journalism—for if the Brest paper, printed at the same time as this *Western Mail*, could give the main facts of the discovery of the notes, surely the Plymouth papers should have been able to print full details—I set to work to read down each column, looking for other evidences of incapacity, and in the Police Court news dropped across the very thing I was looking for—with some startling variations. I hadn't read a dozen lines before I realized that the Official Receiver would get no wire from me that day.

Naturally I had never thought of reading the Police Court news—one doesn't haul a bank cashier before the magistrates for discovering stolen property—but the matter had reached the Police Court, for all that.

"A sequel to the surprising discovery reported in our Monday's issue came before the Plymouth Bench yesterday, when George Peters, forty-six, of 17 Friary Terrace, Mutley, was charged with uttering three forged Bank of England notes for five pounds each. P.C. Hathaway having given evidence of arrest, Henry Soames, second cashier of the Plymouth branch of the

London and Western Bank, stated that on July 2 last, the accused, who is the wharfmaster at Millbay Docks, paid in the sum of £42, 16s. 3d. in notes, cheques, and coin, to be placed to the credit of his employers, the Millbay Dock Company. Three of the bank notes were subsequently found to bear numbers which had been published as stolen by the absconding banker, Bernard Schofield, who was drowned in the *Aspasie* disaster last June, and upon further examination these three notes were discovered to be forgeries. Mr. H. W. Pearcey, for the defence, submitted that there was no evidence of intent to defraud, Peters having made no attempt to pass the notes into circulation. He claimed that the notes had come into his client's possession in the ordinary course of business, and had been paid into his employers' account in the usual way. His client bore an unblemished reputation, as was proved by the trust placed in him by his employers, and his lawyer commented strongly upon the methods of a bank which allowed doubtful notes, whether stolen or forged, to remain in their possession undetected for nearly two months.

"Mr. W. Harvey Lord, watching the case on behalf of the London and Western Bank, asked permission to make a statement explanatory of the alleged lax methods of the bank. Only a day or two after the notes in question were paid in, the whole of the moneys stolen by Schofield had been discovered aboard the *Aspasie*. He submitted that the bank officials, knowing the notes were in London, could not be expected to display the same vigilance respecting their numbers as before.

"George Peters, electing to give evidence on his own behalf, stated that, to the best of his knowledge he cashed the notes on or about June 30, for a steward

discharged from the South African Shipping Company's liner *Matabele*. He had frequently cashed notes in the same way for seamen, stokers, and stewards paid off from the mail boats, and had no reason to suspect the notes were not genuine. He had never seen the steward before, and had no very clear recollection of his appearance beyond the facts that he was short, broadly built, and clean shaven. He—the steward—had informed him he had been discharged for drunkenness. 'And he looked it, your worship,' said the witness, amid laughter.

"Questioned by the prosecution, Peters said the man looked shabby and dirty, 'as though he'd slept out a couple of nights.' He saw nothing remarkable in a discharged steward having fifteen pounds in his possession. At the rate of four pounds a month and tips, he would be surprised if a steward came off a three months' voyage with less. He saw no reason for disbelieving the man's statement that he had been discharged from the *Matabele*, that boat having called in the Sound that same morning. (It was stated by a representative of the South African Shipping Company that no member of the *Matabele's* crew had been discharged at Plymouth on this occasion.) Peters further added that the loss would be his, as he would have to refund the fifteen pounds to his employers out of his own pocket. After consultation, the magistrates decided to discharge accused on his own recognizances, a decision which was agreed with applause in court. The chairman, remarking that Peters had given his evidence in such a straightforward manner as to make a good impression on the bench, suggested that in future he should exercise more caution before cashing notes for strangers, with which advice Peters was understood to express strong agreement."

What with the heat, and my broken sleep and perplexity of the last two days, the paragraph reduced me to the verge of sheer idiocy. I could only sit and wipe my wet forehead and dimly wonder what on earth would happen next? I read it through again, and yet again, word by word; and as I read there slowly grew in my mind the incongruous picture of a child playing with toy bricks. At first he had only two of them, and setting them up side by side he called them a pair of obelisks, and was very pleased with his simple effort. Some one threw a third brick, knocking them over, and the boy patiently stood his first two up again with the third across them, and his arch pleased him more than his obelisks had done. Came a fourth brick, and knocked his arch flying, whereupon, after consideration, he set to, built it up again, with the fourth brick atop for a pinnacle, and felt that the resources of toy architecture were exhausted. But a whole box more bricks squashed his final effort flat, and left him with a problem beyond his powers. How was he to use all his material, whose utmost imagination could not soar beyond an archway with a pinnacle upon it?

In all my conjectures I had been right in one thing, and one thing only—that it was impossible to make a guess at this game till all the cards were on the table. Here was my final solution of the matter, that had looked so good and sound in the midnight hours, knocked higher than Gilderoy's kite before ten in the morning. One theory after another had been demolished by new facts; but till now each new fact had brought some new suggestion with it, and I had gone on building new theories to fit. Now, what was I to do with this new piece of information? It wouldn't accommodate itself to any of the other facts. Could I make it fit in? Was it worth while theorizing at all

till I could be sure no more staggering developments were waiting to be flung at my head ?

Fletcher's first note had been puzzle number one. I had solved that to my own satisfaction at once by deciding it was a forgery. And it wasn't; it was genuine. Then the three notes I had got here at Brest suggested two more solutions of the mystery. Either they were genuine also, in which case Schofield must have shed them before his flight, or they were forgeries, and if so the Schofield embezzlement was a small affair in face of the financial scandal which threatened France. Either solution might fit the facts divulged so far, and I was only waiting to hear from Jem West before deciding which I should adopt as correct.

Then came the English note, which seemed to favour the idea of the earlier thefts by Schofield. Then the discovery of more English notes at Plymouth, reported in the *Journal de Brest*, had demolished both those theories. On that discovery I had set to work and built up another solution; that of a thieving clerk in the Official Receiver's office—a theory that fitted every fact so far—and now this precious police news report knocked all my conjectures endways, and left me woolgathering. I was further from making a guess at the meaning of it all than I had been at the very beginning.

One thing was certain. I had to meet and talk with Mr. George Peters, wharfmaster at Millbay, before I was two days older. Down the ramps I marched again, boarded the *Antelope*, and asked when they were due to return to Plymouth? That night, I was informed. They sailed at six o'clock. At first I thought I would send a message to Miss Trimen telling her our excursion next day must be postponed; but decided to try and find her, and explain my movements in person.

Madame Auffret was at home, and paid me the compliment of receiving me informally. Her rosy cheeks were shining with the heat, but she was busying herself about her apartment in true French style, her hair pinned up in a duster and a feather broom in hand. She readily informed me that Mademoiselle had a pupil that morning in the rue Ernest Renan, and another in the afternoon in the rue Malakoff, both suburban addresses. Also she believed it was Mademoiselle's custom to lunch at a café at a corner of the Place St. Martin, about half-way between the two places.

I thanked her, expressed regrets at my being called back to England that same evening, assured her that the Point S. Mathieu excursion was only postponed for a few days; and walked slowly through the stifling streets to the Place St. Martin. It was then only half-past eleven, so there was no need for hurry, and I was lucky enough to intercept Miss Trimen just at the corner of St. Martin's Church.

By this time the storm was imminent, the clouds banked yellowish black overhead, and the atmosphere, overcharged with electricity, produced in one a feeling of weary apprehension. Miss Trimen looked pale and fagged out. She was evidently surprised to see me, but when I had explained the exigency of the situation as an excuse for seeking her, I thought did not seem displeased.

I asked her if we should lunch together, and on her agreeing sought her café—a modest little place, but clean and sweet, and stamped with the mark of its owner's unremitting personal attention—and there sat at a little table to our meal.

By the time she had rested for a quarter of an hour, she had somewhat recovered from the evident weariness caused by her morning's work. A glass of vin ordinaire,

plentifully diluted with water, brought the colour to her cheeks again, and as her afternoon class was not until half-past three we had plenty of time to sit and talk.

She asked my reasons for returning so suddenly to England, and I told her I had been recalled. Again it occurred to me that she might think all this poking of my nose into what, after all, was no affair of mine, was hardly dignified. It was interesting, without a doubt, but somehow I didn't like to confess to it. I wanted to court her liking, not her criticism, as yet ; so when I thought the tone of one of her remarks sounded like a question, I said I was going back about some journalistic work. It was true, in letter if not in spirit. A report in the *Western Mail* was my reason for going.

"To London ? " asked she.

"No, to Plymouth. Do you know Plymouth ? "

"I sailed from there for Brest the night after—after——" She hesitated and stopped dead. I saw what was wrong. That beastly wreck had come into her mind again.

"Of course," I cut in, and went on talking fast, looking away from her and out across the square, where the first heavy drops of the coming storm were sending up little puffs of dust in the roadway, and streaking a few lines on the old walls of the church. "Of course. I should have remembered. Well, that's where I'm going. I shall be back in a few days, at most. Then we'll have our excursion with Madame Auffret. My work won't take me more than a few hours—a mere police court case I have to look into——"

"A police court case ? Yes ? " Her voice was flat and expressionless ; but she was evidently trying to centre her attention on my talk. I gabbled on as

fluently as I could, trying to interest her, and so put the wreck out of her mind.

"Yes. Nothing of importance. A—a man I know——"

Flash! The storm had broken, and the thunder, close on the heels of the lightning, set the glasses on the table jingling. I turned to the girl to find her looking pale and startled.

"That was close, eh? Are you afraid of lightning, Miss Trimen?"

"Not—not very. What were you saying about a police court case?"

"At Plymouth. A case of trying to pass forged bank notes."

"Forged—Oh!" The second flash was brighter and closer than the first—a glare even by daylight. It brought terror to the girl's face; her hand went to her throat, and she seemed to crouch forward on the table. A glass rolled to the floor, the noise of its fall drowned by the crash and rumble of the thunder-peal, and only then I saw what had happened. Her cheek was as white as the cloth it pressed upon, and she had fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XI

PETERS OF MILLBAY DOCKS

MADAME la patronne came running, followed by a scared waiting-maid, and at their bidding I picked up the girl in my arms and carried her into an inner room, where I left her to their attentions, and went back to our table to watch the rain, now coming down like the Deluge itself.

In ten minutes she came out, recovered, if still pale, and began to apologize for her stupidity.

"Don't talk of it. You were done up with the heat," I said. "You looked tired out when I met you, and that certainly was an awful flash. I thought the church was struck. Don't go to your class this afternoon, Miss Trimen. Go home and lie down, and let me send a telegram to say you're not well."

She shook her head. "I must do my work. I shall soon be better, now the storm's broken. This thunder will clear the air. I'll sit here for a while, and you shall go on talking to me."

"Not one word more. I've helped tire you already with my chatter. If you must go to your work, drink a cup of coffee first. You've an hour to spare."

She sat quiet, drinking her coffee and watching the rain-swept square. There were groups taking shelter at most of the other tables in the café—a workman or two, and some clerks and work-girls—all rather quiet, as though awed by the storm. A few curious glances were directed at us, but for the most part the people

seemed sufficiently interested in the weather to leave us alone. The storm passed over rapidly, and when at a quarter-past three she rose to go, the sun had come out again, and the wet pavements were steaming in the heat. Assuring me she was perfectly recovered, she allowed me to accompany her to the corner of the rue Malakoff, where I left her looking very white and worn, and went back to the hotel to pack my traps and pay my bill. By half-past six that evening I was on the deck of the *Antelope* as she steamed out of Brest Harbour on her way to Plymouth, and at eleven next morning was inquiring for Mr. George Peters at Millbay docks.

His office was easily found—a little tin shed in the corner of the wharf, every part of which could be commanded from its window—but its only occupant was a youthful and harried clerk, whose attention was divided between half a dozen spike-files and two men's heads butting each other at the pay-hatch, each demanding a waybill, or manifest, or shipping form of some kind.

"Mr. Peters here?" I asked.

"No, he ain't."

"Can you tell me when he's likely to be here?"

"No, I can't."

"Is he on the wharf now?"

"I dunno."

"Can you give me any idea as to where I can find him?"

"No, I can't."

"Well, when he comes back, just tell him the brother-in-law of the managing director's called, will you? And that he's gone straight from here to the Company's office."

The youth dropped three files on the floor; snarled, "Can't ye wait 'alf a minute," in an agonized whisper

to the couple at the pay-hatch ; and then informed me that Mr. Peters was there " not quartern hour ago, sir. 'E isn' on the wharf now, sir. 'E went up street about ten minutes ago, sir. If it's anything important I dessay I can find 'im if you don't mind me leavin' th' office for a minute or two, sir, or would you like to leave a message, sir ? "

" Don't trouble, thanks," I told him. " I'll find Mr. Peters myself. I've no doubt they'll know where he is at the head office," and took my departure, leaving the youth pallid, perspiring, and apologetic.

After that it was vitally important to catch Mr. Peters before his return. If the managing director had no brother-in-law, and Peters was aware of the fact, my *bona fides* would be doubtful from the very start. I slipped a shilling into the hand of the dock policeman at the gate, and gleaned from him that Mr. Peters might have gone out to get his lunch—a fact the paucity of information at his office had already led me to suspect.

" Where does he go, usually ? "

" Well, sir, he might be at the Millbay Tavern. Sometimes he goes there for a pint an' a bit o' bread an' cheese, mornings."

" I'll go straight there. If he comes back while I'm away, ask him to wait here at the gate for a minute or two. I want to see him on most particular business. See ? "

Another shilling lay in the palm of my hand, and the policeman did see, clearly. At the Millbay Tavern, close to the dock gates, the profile of a fuzzy-headed barmaid, scornfully inclining an ear to the little window of the jug and bottle department, informed me that Mr. Peters was not there, had not been there, and was not expected that morning, and back I went to my friend the dock policeman.

"Ain't 'e there, sir?"

"No. Where's the next likely place?"

"Well, 'e might be at—'ere 'e is. That's 'im comin' down the street—the big chap with the mutton-chop whiskers."

The mutton-chop whiskers adorned the face of a round-shouldered giant in decent working clothes, with the unmistakable air of delegated authority on him. He winked at the policeman good-naturedly in passing, and I tackled him at once.

"Mr. Peters?"

"That's me, sir."

"I want a word or two with you," I said. "Can we go into the gate office, constable? Yes? Thank you."

Once in the office, I shut the door with great caution, and came to the point at once.

"It's about these forged notes, Mr. Peters. Can you give me any information which will help us to identify that chap who passed them on you?"

The good-nature went out of his face at once, and he displayed a fist about the size of a ham, as earnest of his feelings on the subject. Could he give a description? Yes, he could. He was ready enough to give all the information in his power. The trouble was that he had very little to give, and that little was rendered so incoherent by bad language that it was difficult to follow.

"Th' dirty lookin' little mean swine, 'e come to me, 'ere on this wharf, an' 'e says, 'Mate,' 'e says, 'I've 'ad the dirty kick-off, off the *Matabele*,' 'e says. 'What for?' says I. 'Just for a extra nip,' says 'e, 'an' mixin' up passengers' clothes what I took to brush out o' two cabins,' 'e says. 'You don't look the sort to 'old with kickin' a bloke out for a little thing like that,' 'e says. Which I ain't, not if it's only once in a while.

That's what I said to 'im, the dirty little etcetera etcetera. 'If it's on'y once it 'appened,' I says, 'they're gettin' stricter on the South African boats than what they used to be,' I says to 'im. 'I been boatswain on them boats myself, an' I don't call to mind they was so strict as that with the flunkey crew in my day. Things must 'a altered,' I says. 'Too true,' says 'e. 'Strict ain't no word for it,' 'e says, 'though not but what it may 'ave 'appened p'raps twice.' 'Or p'raps three times,' I says, laughin' like. 'Well, maybe it might 'a 'appened three times,' says 'e, 'an' what wi' that, an' what with a accident I 'ad lightin' my pipe, when I burnt my beard an' 'ad to shave it off, it looked that one-sided, the purser 'e gives me the dirty push off when the tender come alongside this morning.' I begins to think p'raps the purser 'ad 'is reasons, for when a man can't light 'is pipe without burnin' 'is face, then 'e's enjoyin' of 'isself too much to attend to 'is job—to do it proper, that is."

"Had he burnt his face? "

"Nothin' to show. There wasn't no mark on it, but you could see 'e'd only just shaved off 'is beard a day or two before, 'is chin and cheeks bein' whiter than what the rest of 'is face was. 'Ow long ago was that? ' I asks 'im. 'A day or two,' says 'e. 'Maybe three or four. I've 'ad a excitin' an' amoosin' voyage,' says 'e, 'an' I 'aven't 'ad no time to take notice o' trifles like that. I never 'ad no 'ead for figures, neither,' says 'e, 'an' talkin' about figures, can you tell me where I can change a fi'-pun note? I ain't got no change on me,' 'e says. 'D'ye think they can make change at the little pub over the way? ' says 'e. 'If so, what do you say to joinin' me in a glass to England, 'ome and beauty? ' 'e says.

"'All right,' I says to 'im. 'I'm on,' I says. 'But

whether they'll be able to change a fi'-pun note, that I can't say,' I says. 'Well, where can we change it?' says 'e, an' like a fool, I says, 'I dessay I can manage it for you, in my office,' I says. 'Can you?' says 'e, lookin' surprised like, an' I says, 'Yes, or 'arf a dozen, if it's made worth my while.'

" 'What d'ye call worth your while?' says 'e. 'A shillin' in the pound,' I says. 'That's a 'igh rate of exchange,' 'e says, 'but I like the look of you, mate, an' will deal with no other firm,' 'e says. 'Ere's three fi'-pun notes.' An' like a moon-calf I parts with fourteen pun five, good money, for them — pieces o' paper."

"What happened after that?"

"We goes across to the Millbay Tavern an' 'as a glass—or maybe two. Then I 'as to come back 'ere, an' 'e promises to meet me there in the dinner hour, an' what a evenin' we'd 'ave together, an' 'ow I was to show 'im the sights of Plymouth. I wish I 'ad the — 'ere now. I'd show 'im somethin', I would."

The something referred to appeared to be the enormous fist, violently shaken.

"And didn't you see him again?"

"Not me. Nor nobody else, so far's I can make out. I gets back a hour later, an' the young woman in the bar, she says, 'Your friend 'ave gone up to town,' she says, 'an' lef' word for me to tell you particular 'e'd meet you 'ere at eight this evenin'.' So when I knocks off I goes 'ome an' cleans meself, an' down to the Millbay Tavern, an' waits an' waits till chuck time at eleven o'clock, an' not another sight 'ave I 'ad of the — since."

"Can you give me any description of him?"

"No more than what I've gived the police, dozens o' times a'ready." He shut his eyes, and reeled off what evidently was the wording adopted by the police in

their report. "A man about five foot six or seven, broadly built, brown 'air goin' grey, grey eyes, aged about forty-five or fifty, dressed in blue serge reefer coat with brass buttons, blue serge waistcoat and trousers, and of dissipated appearance."

"Is that all?"

"That's as much as I got in mind o' the chap. Ain't it enough?"

"Of dissipated appearance, you say?"

"I didn't use them words. That's what the police inspector wrote down." (Just as I had suspected.)

"What I said was 'e looked as if 'e'd slep' out a couple o' nights."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, 'is clothes looked too big for 'im, an' they was muddy an' dusty with a few bits of 'ay or straw or somethin' like that stuck on 'em. Like as if 'e'd been sleepin' out in a field."

"They were sailor's clothes?"

"Steward's. Deck 'ands don't wear reefers an' brass buttons."

"What sort of manner had he?"

"Manners? I didn't see 'is manners. We didn' 'ave no meal together."

"I don't mean that. Did he have any particular sort of way with him? How did he speak?"

"Oh, a pleasant spoken chap. That's what made me take up with 'im. 'E 'ad a very friendly way with him, —— 'im! If it 'adn't been for 'im doin' me down about them notes, I should 'a said 'e was a nice pleasant sort o' chap—too good for a ship's steward."

And with that I had to be content. Mr. Peters was ready to go on at length, and did go on at length, upon the subject; but henceforth his conversation was mere repetition, except for an occasional pyrotechnic display of novel abuse. He had no more information to

impart, and, reviewing what he had told me, it looked as though my journey from Brest had been singularly devoid of result. The only facts I had added to those published in the police court news were that before the *Matabele's* arrival the mysterious steward had slept ashore, probably in a field, for a night or two. Mud, dust, and little bits of straw are not found on men's clothes at sea. Also, that he had a pleasant manner, and that he had only recently shaved his beard when he was at Millbay. How these points could possibly have any bearing on the Schofield affair, or on my finding stolen notes at Brest, I failed to see, try as I would. And, nosing after such details, I was as unconscious of the one important piece of information which Mr. Peters had imparted as was that indignant gentleman himself.

I went back to the hotel where I had left my bag, hesitating whether I should return to Brest at once, or stay a day or two in Plymouth, and perhaps run up to town to find out what Jem West had done about the notes I sent him. But at the hotel I picked up a copy of the *Morning Chronicle*, and, glancing through it, chanced on a report of a meeting of creditors in the matter of Whitby, Harrison & Schofield. At this meeting a resolution had been passed unanimously calling upon the Official Receiver to allocate part of the moneys recovered from the *Aspasie* as a first dividend. It was represented that all claims against the estate had been investigated, and that, some of the creditors being in distressed circumstances, there was no reason against paying a dividend out of some portion of the sum recovered.

Knowing what I did, it struck me that there might be a very good reason for not paying a dividend immediately, and, unless I was much mistaken, Scotland Yard had supplied that reason. Something very

funny seemed to be going on in the background with regard to Schofield's plunder. If the money from the *Aspasie* had been seriously depleted, either before or after its recovery from the wreck, the Criminal Investigation Department would be sure to forbid any public statement of accounts likely to hamper their movements, let meetings of creditors pass all the resolutions they pleased.

But it was probable that Jem West had attended the meeting, and, thinking I should like to see him and hear his story, I wired him asking whether I should come to town or whether he would come to Plymouth. He replied at once, asking me to meet him at Millbay station at five-thirty that evening, and by six his traps were installed in the hotel, and we were walking up and down the Hoe together.

I told him all I'd done, and then asked if he'd attended the meeting of creditors.

"The meeting?" said he. "Oh, bother the meeting. Yes, I was there, and the fools were clamouring as though the O.R. had robbed them with his own hands. We shall get our money in time, I suppose. Or some of it. Some is gone. These notes are genuine, Austin."

"Which of them?"

"The French ones. Pam'ly went to the Banque with me, and told the cashier flatly they were forgeries—as you told us to do—and he swore blind they were good. Offered to cash 'em if we'd supply the corners we'd cut off. As to the English note, it's in my pocket now. There's nothing wrong with that one, is there?"

"How do I know? The three found here at Plymouth are duds. Haven't you seen the case in the papers?"

"I should think I had. The London dailies sent down special correspondents. What's it all mean, Austin?"

"I can't tell you," I said. "It's all one maze to me. Every note I've made up my mind must be a forgery proves to be good. That being so, Schofield must have shed some plunder before he started—just as you suggested at first. But how these English forgeries found at Plymouth fit into the puzzle beats me. P'r'aps they don't fit in at all. P'r'aps they're just an accident—whoever forged 'em chanced on the Schofield numbers by pure luck. But you know, Jem, I feel it in my bones that there's some connexion between them and the Schofield swindle."

"Got any reasons for thinking so?" he asked.

"Not one—yes, one. The modern method of the forger is to use photo-zincotypes. If these faked notes were made by photography they would naturally bear the same numbers as the originals they were photographed from, and we know these originals were at one time in Schofield's possession. That's the only possible connexion I can think of, and it's a thin one, I grant you."

"They might have been photographed before they got into the hands of Whitby, Harrison & Schofield. Eh?"

"I should say it's about a million to one they were. In fact, I can't see how they could have been photographed afterwards. The next question is, Is that note I got in Brest genuine? Let's have a look at it."

He fished it out of his pocket, and we looked at it, back and front, upside-down and right way up, and tried to see the watermarks against the sky, and, so far as we could judge, it looked like any other five-pound note.

"We'll take it to a bank in the morning and get expert opinion," I decided at length.

"Shall you cut the number off?"

"No. Hand it over the counter, and tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about it. They'll want to know where I got it, and I shall tell 'em. I expect you'll find later on that our mysterious steward got away from here *viâ* the Brest steamer, and planted it there on his way to sunnier climes."

Next morning we presented ourselves at the local office of the London and Western Bank, demanded to see the manager, and placed the note before him. I pointed out that the number tallied with one of those on the Schofield list, and said I presumed this was another forgery.

"Very probably," said he, at once. "I can very soon tell you, if you will allow me to examine it."

But he wasn't quite as quick about it as we expected. Just as we had done the night before, he stared at it back and front, and then held it up to the light to inspect the watermarks. Then he rang for a magnifying glass, and, after about ten minutes' poring over the thing, hummed and hawed a bit, and finally announced he couldn't say definitely, one way or the other.

"It may be a forgery, of course, but it certainly does not resemble those which we have had occasion to produce in the police court recently. If you hadn't drawn my attention to the number, I should have been ready to cash it myself. As things are, however, I must ask you to leave the note here, and give me your names and addresses, gentlemen."

There was only one thing to do, after that. One hint of any evasion, and we should probably have been detained for inquiries. Nobody wants that sort of thing; so we gave our names and addresses, and I supplemented mine with a full description of how I came by the note at Brest. The matter of the French notes I kept to myself, but on all other points was

open as the day. "We're staying at the Royal here at present, but shall be returning to London either to-morrow or next day."

"Are you really coming back to town?" Jem asked me, when we were in the street again.

"For a little while, till the police have verified our statements about this note, at all events. Then I think I'll go back to Brest again, and see if I can get any more notes, or find out anything about that missing steward who didn't come off the *Matabele*. It's no good going back until they're satisfied we've told the truth about this note. I should have a pair of wooden-headed detectives after me wherever I went. Can't you see that?"

"I suppose the police will be called in?" said he doubtfully.

"Of course they will, you chump. Bet you what you like, a message has gone to local headquarters already. Be the note good or bad, it's got a Schofield number on it. Think they'll let that pass?"

"I suppose not," said he. And before the day was over he was convinced I was right, for once. An inspector called about lunch time, took down all the particulars we had given the bank manager in his note-book, and went away. By two o'clock an extra man in uniform was unostentatiously patrolling the street outside the door of the hotel. When we went for a walk in the afternoon, we were accompanied at a respectful distance by two other large gentlemen in plain clothes; and when we got back about tea-time, every maid and waiter in the place was looking at us out of the corners of their eyes. I laughed, but Jem got fidgety about it.

"I don't like this," he said.

"Bless your heart, this is nothing," I told him.

"Go up to your room, and see if your luggage has been searched."

"Ridiculous," said he. "They'd never dare." But they had dared; and my traps were all slightly disarranged as well. For provincial police, they had wasted no time.

"How long is this going to last?" Jem was fuming about it.

"Just as long as we like. Let's go to the police station after tea, and tell them to stop it."

"Think they will?"

"I expect so. I daresay we can convince them we're honest. Thieves don't go paying calls at police stations, as a rule."

A stolid police inspector received our complaint. He wasn't aware we were being shadowed, and he couldn't say whether any search-warrants had been issued that day. I took him to the door, pointed out the two detectives who had followed us from the hotel—they were looking very much at a loss on finding us walking into headquarters in this way—and requested that they might be allowed a rest.

"It's silly," I said. "It's wasting the ratepayers' money. We've handed over the note and given all the information we can about it, and this shadowing and searching is just nonsense. We're going back to London to-morrow morning by the ten-twenty. If you want to see us off you can; but don't bother to chase us about like this. I don't mind, personally, but it makes my friend here feel like a criminal."

It was quite useless. All the inspector could say was "Yes, sir," "No, sir," "Cert'nly, sir"; and we went back to the hotel the same party of four, the two wooden-heads fifty paces in the rear.

One of them went up in the train with us next day

and patrolled the corridor, peeping at us every time he passed our carriage, until I begged him to come and sit with us. He seemed very perturbed at our discovering his rôle, but did as he was told, and we got to Paddington in peace.

As the train was running into the station, I asked him if he was meeting anyone? He didn't know. It wasn't his duty to answer my questions, and evidently he meant to abide by his duty. So we waited on the platform till I spotted the two detectives who had been detailed to meet him, and tackled the three of them together.

"Gentlemen, you're told off to shadow us," I said.

They admitted nothing. They were perfectly polite, but they weren't paid to supply information, and they didn't intend to supply it.

"Well," I said. "You know your business best. However, I can tell you where my friend and myself are going, if it'll save you any trouble. We're going straight to Scotland Yard, and if one of you cares to ride in our taxi, we'll give him a lift that far."

One did, and in half an hour we were interviewing the chief inspector on duty. He was a sensible chap, with a certain good-nature lurking about the corners of his mouth, and I played the buffoon, told my story of the shadowing so as to make him laugh, and after that all was easy. A telephone message brought the *Chronicle* Police Court man down to identify me, whilst a detective accompanied Jem West to his bank for the same purpose, and in less than an hour we were free to go where we pleased, unattended.

Going out: "Look here, inspector," I said. "I've made a joke of this, but mind you, a good many men would have put up a fuss, and caused you a lot of bother, wouldn't they?"

"Why, some might, Mr. Voogdt," said he. His tone delicately implied that people who did that sort of thing weren't fine fellows like myself, and I winked at him to indicate full understanding.

"One good turn deserves another. When you find out where that note came from, tell me, will you? I'd like to know."

"We'll see," said he. "I needn't tell a gentleman of your experience that that would be a bit irregular, need I?"

"Of course," I said. "We all know regulations are necessary. But men don't become heads of departments only by adhering strictly to them, do they?" In my turn, I tried to imply that rules and regulations were made for underlings, not for such strong men as chief inspectors. It was his turn now to wink at me, and we both laughed as we shook hands.

"I shall call and see you towards the end of the week, then." I spoke as though it were an understood thing.

"Always glad to see such amusing gentlemen as yourself, Mr. Voogdt," said he, and we parted on the best of terms.

But outside in the taxi, Jem West was mopping his forehead.

"My hat!" said he. "And that's what you get let in for by handling a doubtful note. I'll do my business in coin for ever, after this."

"Eh?" said I absently.

"I say I'll avoid bank notes in future. What are you so quiet about?"

"Me? Oh, I was just thinking. About — er — Brest — Cook's office. You know. Where the note came from. I wonder—I wonder if they'll trace it?"

CHAPTER XII

THE HOUNDS TAKE THE SCENT

PAMELA WEST laughed till the tears came into her eyes at her husband's description of our journey from Plymouth to Castelnau.

"I can't see anything to laugh at," grumbled he.

"Nothing to laugh at! Oh! you dear. You innocent. Oh, it's lovely. Oh, my side does hurt so, Jemmy. Haven't I always told you to keep out of bad company. And you rush off to Plymouth, without me——"

"Ah, there lies the sting," said I, coming to his rescue.

"You be quiet, Austin. I'll attend to you directly. You go off, leaving your poor little wife at home; you consort with evil characters; and you come home in custody. Q.E.D. There's no more to be said about it." She wheeled round to me. "When are you going back to Brest?"

"I—I don't know. I thought of staying in town for a while."

"You are going back, then?"

Under cover of noise and laughter, she had caught me fairly. It was no good trying to wriggle out of it, so I rushed in.

"Certainly I'm going back," I said. "D'you think I'm going to leave this puzzle where it is? I'm only waiting to hear whether this note is genuine, and let the police trace it, and as soon as all the fuss has died down back I go again."

"In search of more notes, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

She could only sniff, and sniff she did, and there the matter ended for the time. But if I'd tried to hint for one moment that I wasn't anxious to get back to Brest she'd never have rested till she'd found out my real reason for going.

I dawdled about town for a week, paying calls and doing my best to kill time, and punctually on the seventh day presented myself at Scotland Yard, as cock-sure as only a fool can be. My inspector was waiting for me, evidently, for I was shown up to him at once.

"Well," I asked, "is the note genuine?"

"Didn't you know that?" said he drily.

"No, I didn't. It is genuine, then? Good. Have I got five pounds to come?"

"That's a matter for you to decide with the owners of the note, Mr. — Voogdt, is it? It's stolen property, you see."

"I suppose I can make Cook's people return the money, anyhow. Have you traced it?"

He leaned back in his chair and twiddled his thumbs, looking the picture of benevolence.

"Why, yes," he said slowly. "We've traced it,—up to a certain point. What were you doing in Brest, may I ask, Mr. Voogdt?"

He looked as dull as the village idiot, his face one broad grin of stupid good-nature, and I began to feel nervous. When a chief inspector at Scotland Yard pretends to be a fool, there's trouble coming for somebody.

"Question for question," I drawled, as slowly as himself. "What does 'up to a certain point' mean? Can't you tell me where the note came from?"

"Why, no," said he. "I can't. Not yet. No good trying to tell you till we know ourselves, is it? I s'pose you were holidaying in Brest, Mr. Voogdt?"

"I was."

"Ah. A pretty place. Lovely country, Brittany, they tell me. Got any friends over there, sir?"

For a moment the room spun round me. As though it were before me, I saw Miss Trimen's white face pressed against that tablecloth, and perceived in a flash why she had fainted, and how those notes could—might—must have got to Brest. It lay between us two. I was the only other person in the world who had been at the wreck of the *Aspasie*, and had gone from there to Brest. And the notes were there before me. I felt physically sick—and then (thought is swift, and I don't suppose the shock had taken me aback for more than half a second)—then I waked to the fact that the inspector was waiting for my answer, looking at me more benignantly than ever.

"N-no," I stammered. "No. I haven't any friends there. I was only there a day or two."

By the Everlasting Mercy there came a tap at the door. My inspector lumbered to his feet—with his assumed stupidity he had put on the gait of a plough-boy—and answered it himself. In that moment, when his eye was off me, I got the Schofield list out of my breast-pocket, twisted off about half of it, and stuffed the crumpled fragment into my sleeve with my handkerchief. Any detective that knew his business could soon trace its date and identify the North Devon paper from which I had cut it by the letterpress at the back. When he came back from a mumbled conversation with a subordinate at the door, I was ready for him.

"And how did you come to notice the number of the note, Mr. Voogdt?" he asked.

"I always take the number of every note that passes through my hands," I said, with the assured manner of the born liar.

"Very methodical. Ve-ry methodical, indeed. Ah, I wish more people were like you. The trouble we get here through mere carelessness, sir! You'd never believe."

He sighed as one for whom life is too burdensome a thing, and I got to my feet. "And—and if you get any information"—I licked my lips as though they were dry. Heaven grant I didn't overdo the thing—"if you get—when you've discovered the source of that note, Mr. Inspector, I should take it as a personal favour if you let me know. I—I'm interested in it. Purely as a matter of idle curiosity, you understand?"

"Of course, sir. I understand," said he, as one soothing a child.

"And you have my address?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Voogdt. I believe so. Didn't you leave it the other day? Just off Portland Place. Oh yes, we shall have it somewhere, for certain. Good morning, Mr. Voogdt."

"Good morning," I said, and at the door, with my back to him, pulled out my handkerchief and made as though to wipe my forehead surreptitiously, converting it into an obvious pretence of blowing my nose. The scrap of paper fell to the floor, and I shut the door behind me, and went off leaving the sown seed behind me. It was pretty clumsy, but I knew they couldn't afford to disregard it altogether.

It was my turn to take a hand in the game now. She and I alone of all the world had been at the wreck, and had gone from there to Brest. She and I, alone. She and I, alone. And if I could direct suspicion to

myself, it might draw their attention away from her for the moment. If only we could be alone together, she and I, away out of this coil. It was no good trying to blink the fact: whatever she was, I loved her. No matter what sort of a thief she was, I didn't care. I loved her. Whether she was one of a gang working on this Schofield business, or whether in the panic aboard the *Aspasie* she had just snatched at one of Schofield's parcels, and got away with it,—which-ever it was, I didn't care. She was the only woman in the world for me, and I was on her side if it led me into penal servitude.

And all the time something inside me—I thought it was untrustworthy emotion and not cold reason—said, "Fool. Fool. She's as straight as God's daylight. You, who know men and women, you know she is. You, that accuse her in your mind of stealing money in a panic, how did you find her when you boarded that wreck? Stealing money, fool?"

But I wouldn't listen. I thought it was my heart trying to comfort me, not my head. The evidence was against her. My cursed theorizing, round and round and round about the puzzle, had woven a net, and caught in its meshes the girl I loved. I wasn't man enough to say: "You've looked in her eyes, and seen the sweetness and the truth in them, and they're the only evidence worth taking. If your theories say one thing and her eyes another, then though all the Gospels and the law and the prophets are on your side, her eyes speak truth and your dirty theories are a slander and a lie." No, I wasn't man enough to say it, even to myself. All I could say was: "I love a thief, and, right or wrong, I'll get her clear even if it means jail for me in her place."

Walking slowly, with my eyes on the pavement and

my brain in a whirl, I walked past my own door, and, turning to retrace my steps, came face to face with a man I knew. Half distraught as I was, I couldn't place him for the moment, but nodded, gave him a good-day, and passed.

He cut me dead. I had made a mistake ; and the trifle added some slight annoyance to the wretchedness at my heart. Only as I climbed my stairs his face came back to me again, and I understood why he had passed me by. He must have been more annoyed at my recognition than I was at his disregarding it, for he was the detective who had called on me at Falmouth about the Schofield affair. Scotland Yard had got busy in quick time.

All that weary afternoon I watched the street, standing as far back from the window as I could, and, though my Falmouth friend put in no reappearance after my recognition, by six o'clock I had satisfied myself that I was watched. The ragged loafer at the corner of Portland Place went off duty at four, and was replaced by a bootblack who planted himself down on the pavement with his stand and brushes, and amused himself by reading a yellow-covered weekly journal. He disappointed me, I admit. Bootblacks do not start on new pitches in the neighbourhood of Portland Place at four o'clock in the afternoon, and I thought Scotland Yard might have credited me with sufficient intelligence to have noted the fact. However, I had excited suspicion, which was all to the good so far.

What to do next I did not know. I wanted to get a warning to her, and yet for the life of me I could not see how it was to be done. It was possible that I was too late : that she was shadowed already as well as I, and if so the Brest mail would be sure to be watched. Letters addressed to her from London would be scruti-

nized, and—they had a sample of my handwriting at Scotland Yard—any from me would almost inevitably be opened. That was a point worth making sure about, at all events. I sat down and wrote her at once, expressing my regrets that I was unable to return to Brest for a while, and that our excursion must be again postponed. As a postscript, I said I had a schoolboy friend, a stamp collector, and would she please send back the envelope so that I could give it to him. She would easily understand that it was difficult for him to get an envelope with an English stamp that had been used for foreign postage. Then, before sticking down the flap, I shook a tiny fleck of cigarette ash on the wet gum. If the envelope were, steamed open that fleck would be disturbed for certain.

For three long days I dawdled about as before, always with some attendant or other at a respectful distance, and then came her first letter, breathing of the kindness and sweetness and goodness I knew were in her. I was not to worry about the excursion. She was sorry it was postponed, but another opportunity would doubtless come later. Madame Auffret was well, and sent her kind regards, and she was my sincere friend Marguerite Trimen. The envelope was enclosed as requested, and would my schoolboy friend like some French stamps?

I wrote at once to say he longed for French stamps. That meant another letter from her, at all events, and could do her no possible harm. And then, soaking the envelope in a saucer of warm water, I opened the flap as carefully as though I were engaged on a surgical operation, and the tiny dot of ash was gone. I had been too late in attracting suspicion to myself. The net was round us both now in earnest, and for all my anxiety on her behalf I felt a little thrill like gladness, too. If

she was trapped, at worst it looked as though we were in the trap together.

I saw Jem West almost daily—it says much for Scotland Yard's methods that neither he nor Pamela noticed I was shadowed—and a day or two after Miss Trimen's letter arrived he proposed that we should go together to an extraordinary meeting of the Schofield creditors.

“What's the meeting for?”

“I don't know. They're trying to put the screw on the Official Receiver, I believe. It may be interesting. Will you come?”

“That I will. But can I get in?”

“Oh, I expect so. You'll only have to mention the *Chronicle*. They'll welcome a press man with open arms. It's publicity they're howling for.”

As he said, there was no difficulty in gaining admittance to the meeting. A mention of the Press proved an open sesame at once, and I found a very mixed assembly of men and women, very anxious, rather angry, and very much in earnest. The leading spirits evidently had the whole thing framed up beforehand, and resolutions were put and passed at top speed.

That lawyers be appointed on behalf of the creditors. Put, seconded, and passed without remark. That those lawyers be Messrs ——. The proposer named a firm notorious as brewers of trouble, worrying as terriers, tenacious as bulldogs, and up to every trick and turn of their trade. Put, seconded, and passed *nem. con.* That Messrs. the lawyers be instructed to ascertain what action could be taken to put pressure on the Official Receiver. Put, seconded, and carried unanimously. That Messrs. Brown, Jones, Robinson, and two more be appointed as a committee on behalf of the creditors, to whom the chosen lawyers should re-

port at once. Put and carried. That, in the event of the lawyers reporting that an action would lie against the Official Receiver, this committee should be empowered to instruct the lawyers to take that action at once. Put and carried; and the meeting broke up. The whole thing had been got through inside of a quarter of an hour.

"Your people mean business," I said to Jem West when we got outside.

"Looks like it, doesn't it? Well, and about time, too. I'm getting anxious myself. I wonder how much of that money's gone?"

He hadn't to wonder long. The committee must have been out for blood, for detailed reports of the meeting—with which reports I had nothing to do, be sure—were in all the late editions of the evening papers. Next day further reports stated that the selected firm of lawyers advised action, and next day that the action was actually down for hearing.

That same morning came Miss Trimen's second letter, enclosing the French stamps for my imaginary school-boy friend, and I thought I could read trouble between its lines. It was stiffly written, and there was one purposeless-looking sentence in it that puzzled me. "I am sure to be staying with Madame Auffret till the end of the year," she said.

Now, I hadn't asked her how long she was staying, having taken it for granted that she would let me know if by any chance she changed her address. Why should she say there was no need for me to hurry back to Brest, for that our excursion could wait. Or it might mean—if one had the conceit to think so—that she gave me this information in the hope that I would write her again. One might read into it an air of invitation, as it were.

But the tone of the letter didn't bear that out at all. It was a bit stiff—preoccupied—and I wondered whether the sentence was really intended for my eyes? Suppose she, too, had discovered she was shadowed—for she would be, for certain—and had guessed her letters were opened in the post? Mightn't she have put the sentence in for the benefit of those prying eyes? Mightn't it mean that she meant flying from Brest the moment she saw an opportunity? In which case I should lose sight of her again, with a very small chance indeed of rediscovering where she was next time.

That aspect of the thing hadn't occurred to me before, and for the moment I was so upset as to contemplate going straight back to Brest. Then I saw how stupid an idea that was. Such a movement might, and probably would, precipitate matters at once. Suppose I were arrested at Paddington, the girl might perhaps profit by a favourable chance to escape. But, on the other hand, if I were arrested, very likely she would be, too, and even if I got to her my presence might put difficulties in her way, and by that means lead to her arrest. I didn't mind the inconvenience of a few days under lock and key myself, if it would serve her; but to have her arrested, whether alone or at the same time as myself, was a horse of another colour.

And I daren't write and warn her. Though racked with impatience and anxiety to serve her, I couldn't move. My hands were tied, and I was watched day and night. Everywhere I went, one of those unobtrusive attendants came too, until the shadowing began to get on my nerves. I had a mad notion of getting the mutilated French notes from Jem West, replacing their numbered corners, and presenting them at the Banque. If it would have given the girl a chance of escape I'd have done it, even though it meant losing sight of her

altogether, but I couldn't be sure it would help, and it might seriously harm her. I had been with her at Brest, and it was possible that my cashing the French notes would be the signal for her arrest as well as mine. No, that wouldn't do. But the next time I went to Castelnau, I brought the notes away with me, and carried them on my person thenceforward. There was no sense in dragging the Wests into the bother, at all events.

Then, like a very thunderclap, came The sensation of the Schofield affair. Either the lawyers appointed by the creditors had been putting pressure on the Receiver, or the news must have leaked out by other means, for a few days later the morning papers were full of vague hints about the affairs of Whitby, Harrison & Schofield that sent me off in a wild hurry to the office of the *Chronicle*. Jermyn was in, and would see me, some grateful memory of the *Aspasie* reports presumably lingering in his mind.

"What's all this mean?" I demanded.

"We didn't know ourselves when we went to press. The yarn's only confirmed this morning. You'll see it in the evening papers."

"Curse the evening papers! Don't keep a man on tenterhooks. What is it? What's it all about, man?"

"What are you so excited about? Are you a creditor?"

I flared out at him—using language.

"My word, you're peppery this morning. Well, then, they're duds, if you want to know."

"What are duds?"

"The notes that Schofield skipped with. Here's the Press Association report. Read for yourself."

The report, irregularly and hurriedly typed, blue letters on flimsy paper, was the final and culminating

shock of all those which this Schofield business had given me.

“The Official Receiver in Bankruptcy for the City of London reports that the whole parcel of French and English notes stolen by the late Bernard Schofield, and recovered from the wreck of the *Aspasie*, have been examined at the Bank of England and the Banque de la République, and pronounced without exception to be forgeries. The Criminal Investigation Department has the matter in hand.”

And four of the missing notes, certified by the Banque de la République as genuine, were in my breast-pocket. And Scotland Yard had the matter in hand. And somewhere outside in the street one of their detectives was watching the door of the *Chronicle* office waiting, waiting quietly for me to come out. Wherever I went, whatever I did, that quiet gentleman would be near by, watching me. A warrant might be out for me now, at this minute. If it were, his hand would drop on my shoulder the moment I stepped into the street. And the notes were on me: and I had got them at Brest.

“Phoo,” I said. “It’s hot in this office, Jermyn. I’m for the open air. Yes, rum thing about those notes—quite a sensation, eh? Good-bye.”

CHAPTER XIII

BEARDING THE LION

NO hand dropped on my shoulder at the door, and I walked down Fleet Street a free man, save for that faithful companion I knew must be behind me or somewhere pretty close alongside. I had to get rid of those notes as soon as possible, and, hailing a taxi, gave my address, and went home at once. And there I sat down, beat.

All Schofield's notes forgeries! That beat everything. My first impulse, before I had considered the thing at length, was to rejoice. If Schofield's notes were all forgeries, and genuine notes had been cashed by Marguerite Trimen at Brest, it was obvious they had not been stolen from the *Aspasie*. She wasn't a petty thief—one of those ghouls who steal in times of disaster—whatever she might be. That was some small comfort at all events. And, after all, I had no real evidence as yet that she had cashed the notes.

But the feeling of comfort soon gave way to others less pleasant. Since the recovered notes were worthless, Jem West had no dividend to come, and in the end must leave his wife and go to sea again, unless he could find a job ashore.

Above all, where was the bulk of the real notes? Why, in Heaven's name, had Schofield absconded with useless forgeries? Had a smarter thief got ahead of him, substituted the forgeries for the real notes before his flight, and let him go to his death with a parcel of

worthless paper ? Worse than worthless ; the forgeries were dangerous. They doubled the possibilities of his apprehension : he was liable to arrest for passing false notes as well as for embezzlement. And if, as I prayed, Marguerite Trimen had nothing to do with the business, how had the genuine notes got to Brest ? Was it possible that the real thief, whoever he was, had taken advantage of the lull between the wreck and the Official Receiver's report to get rid of his plunder throughout the length and breadth of France, so that the notes were scattered all over the country as well as in Brittany ? In Paris, for instance ? Now that the recovered notes were condemned and everyone was again on the *qui vive*, the genuine ones would soon be coming to light all over the place, if this conjecture was correct.

In any case, I must get back to Brest. And quick, too. Whether the girl was mixed up in the business or not, I wanted to be beside her. If she was guilty, she might want a friend ; if she was innocent, then I must be with her just the same, for I had a question to ask her—a question that had nothing to do with forged bank notes. But I didn't want to go to ask a girl to marry me with a detective at my heels, so the first thing to do was to stop this assiduous shadow that was following me everywhere.

An expert on ju-jitsu told me once that the essence of the game is surprise. A man lets drive at you, and instead of dodging or countering the blow you welcome it. You grab his fist as it comes, and pull it farther than he meant it to go. Then he loses his balance, falls on his face, and you get in your fine work on the back of his neck. Following these tactics, I decided to do the last thing the police could possibly expect of me ; go straight to Scotland Yard, and give them a

surprise. But if done, it had to be done at once, so that they could not think I was prompted by the Official Receiver's report.

With a piece of gummed paper, I stuck the corner on the note I had got from Fletcher, burnt the three others, and ground the blackened paper to fine dust. Then I washed my hands, put on my hat, and took a taxi to Scotland Yard, telling the driver to stop at the first telephone booth he saw.

Pamela West answered the 'phone. "Yes, Jem was in. What was it? Come to Scotland Yard? Oo. Why? . . . Oh, you are mean, Austin. Do tell . . . All right, but you might as well tell me. Can I come with him? . . . Oo, I hate you. You're as mean as mean. . . . Yes, I'll tell him to come. Yes, I promise. . . . Of course I will. Haven't I promised?"

I hung up the receiver, re-entered my taxi, and was driven straight into the lion's mouth.

My inspector was more benignantly bland than ever.

"Good morning, Mr. Voogdt. Good morning. And what can we do for you this morning?"

"You can call off that fool that's been shadowing me," I snapped at him. "I'm getting tired of it."

"Shadowed, sir?" He was very pained at such a dreadful idea. "A mistake, surely. How long have you been subjected to any annoyance of that kind?"

"Ever since I was here last. That chap I interviewed at Falmouth saw me home. Then there was a street loafer at the corner of Portland Place till four, and then a boot-black. A boot-black starting on a fresh pitch in that district at four in the afternoon! D'you take me for a fool, inspector?"

"No, I don't," he said crisply, with all his air of simplicity gone. He looked like sharp business, and I

saw that if I didn't tell my tale properly I should leave Scotland Yard that afternoon in custody.

"Then what do you take me for?"

"A very interesting young man," said he.

"Good. I'll interest you," I told him, and slapped down Fletcher's note on his desk. "What d'ye make of that?"

"I make a French hundred-franc note of it, that's had one corner cut off and stuck on again. That's what I make of it, sir."

"Write the number down"; and he did so, looking puzzled.

"Now under it print my name in capital letters: A. VOOGDT. Notice anything?"

"Why, yes. The number looks rather like the name."

"Now get out your list of the notes Schofield stole. Got it? Good. See the number there?"

The ju-jitsu notion was right. I never saw a man so surprised in my life: he, an inspector of His Majesty's Criminal Investigation Department, versed in all the wiles of wickedness, and, one would have thought, a man not to be surprised by anything on earth. But he goggled at me like a fish.

"Is—is it one of the forged notes?"

"No, it isn't. There's another surprise for you. It's genuine. I've had it examined at the Banque de la République—that's why I cut the corner off—and they've pronounced it genuine."

He tried to pull himself together.

"I'm sorry to have to say it," he said, "for I like you, and you're the most interesting young man I've met for a long time, but it's my duty to warn you that anything more you say may be used in evidence against you. I can't let you go after this."

"Don't be a fool," I said. "You aren't going to arrest me."

"I am, though," he replied.

"No, you're not. I haven't finished yet. Where d'you think I got that note?"

"I don't think anything about it. I know. You got it in Brest."

"Wrong again. It came from Brest, but I didn't get it there. I got it—where d'you think? In Lundy Island, in the Bristol Channel."

He shook his head. "You'll have to prove it, Mr. Voogdt."

"And I'm going to prove it. My witness is on his way here at this moment. I telephoned for him as I came along."

"Who is he?"

"A householder, and a respectable man. His name is West—Mr. James Carthew West, and he lives at 328, Castelnau, close to Hammersmith Bridge. Now if you like to take down my statement, you'll have it ready for him to confirm when he arrives. Shall I go on?"

"By all means, sir, if you wish. But don't forget I've warned you."

"A—ah, you make me tired," I said. "Now listen to me. I got that note with two others from an old sea-captain, name of Fletcher, engaged on salvage work on the *Vedette* at Lundy. The others were ordinary notes, and have nothing to do with the case. But I noticed the number of that one, which, as you see, looks like my name. I had noticed the same accidental resemblance in one of the numbers published in the Schofield list, so spotted it at once. See? When he told me he had got it in Brest I went there to see if I could find any more, and, as you know, I found one English note.

When I was in Brest I made the acquaintance of a lady who lives there, and I wish to meet her again." He nodded. Evidently he knew who the lady was, and all about it. "I want to meet her again, and very naturally I don't want to go over there with one of your detectives at my heels. See? So I've come and given you all the information I have, so that you can call him off. If you lock me up, you'll do no good, for I've no more notes, and know no more than you where to get them. Besides, I've sacrificed my own wishes in the matter. I thought I saw a big scoop for my paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, and now, instead of pursuing my own inquiries, I've put the matter into your hands. For which you ought to be very much obliged."

"Are you on the staff of the *Chronicle*?" he asked.

"Not now, but I used to be, when I had to work for my living. I do occasional work for them—the wreck of the *Aspasie*, for instance."

"You seem to have been tangled up in this Schofield business from the start, Mr. Voogdt," he said suspiciously.

"Damn it! I couldn't help being down there at the time, could I?" I asked him. "You'll want to make out I caused the wreck next?"

His desk telephone ringing at that moment, the inspector stated that Mr. West was below and wanted to see me. "Show him up," he directed.

"I don't want to see him," I said. "I won't be accused of collusion. You've had my story, and you can question him about it as much as you like. I'll wait outside the door."

"As you please. Er—you won't mind——?"

"One of your men keeping an eye on me? Not a

bit," said I ; and Jem West entering at that moment saved the inspector the trouble of giving orders to the policeman with him.

" Here," I said. " Don't go, constable. You've got to keep me company for a minute or two. Jem, just tell the inspector all you know about me, and my getting that French note at Lundy. Tell him every blessed thing he asks you," and marched downstairs in charge of the stolid constable, leaving Jem looking the very picture of perplexity.

But I couldn't have had a better witness as to character. Jem West could never tell the simplest lie without bungling it, and as it was the truth I wanted this time, I felt I was safe in his hands. Any man could turn him inside-out in half an hour : the inspector managed it in twenty minutes, for at the end of that time the office telephone directed the constable to usher me upstairs again.

" Well ? " I asked the inspector. " Are you satisfied ? "

" Entirely," said he.

" I'll just drive it home, if you'll allow me," I said. " Remember I took the English note to the Plymouth bank, and drew their attention to its number the first day after I'd arrived in England. Also, don't forget I've brought this French note to you unsolicited and brought suspicion on myself when I could just as easily have burnt it." I paused, but he made no remark. Jem hadn't mentioned the other three notes, evidently. " Now, after that, am I free to go back to Brest without one of your men after me ? "

" You can go where you like, Mr. Voogdt. All the same, if you don't mind, we should be glad if you would keep us posted as to your doings. You may come across some more information."

"If I do, you shall have it," I promised him. "Now, is this *bona-fide*, this calling off your men?"

"Absolutely *bona-fide*."

"Good. Now, if I'm to help you, I'll ask you one, question, if I may?"

"Go on," said he.

"Have any more of the genuine notes come to light?"

"Yes," he nodded, looking at me curiously.

"French or English?"

"Both."

"How many?"

"One English, five French."

"Where?" Paris, I felt sure, in such quantities as that.

"At Brest," said he.

"All of them?"

"Every single one."

Holding Jem West's arm on the way downstairs, I clutched it till I bruised him. He showed the marks to me afterwards when we reached Castelnau.

I was free, was I? What a mockery of a word! Free! Was ever a man chained more heavily?

I didn't think I could stand Pamela's chaff and chatter, and so tried to get away before lunch, but after a dozen words she felt I was in trouble—and I began to understand there was another side to her character. When I said I'd go: "No," said she quietly. "Stay, Austin."

"I'm—I want to go."

"You'll only carry that black dog with you on your back if you do. Stay here, where you're with friends. You don't want to put on pretty manners for our benefit. Sulk, or talk, or swear, or stamp up and down the garden—do what you like. This is more

your home than your rooms are, I know. Stay, I tell you. You are to stay, or, look here, if you'd rather go, do you mind Jem and myself coming with you to Brest when you go back there ? ”

“ Why ? ” I said, surprised.

“ Why ? To meet Miss Trimen, of course ; and incidentally to see if we can find some more notes. Brest appears to be the storm centre just now. It'll be interesting. What do you say ? ”

“ I—I think I should like it,” I said, rather doubtfully, I confess.

“ Good. Then we'll come.” She went to the open window, and called her husband.

“ Are you going to tell him everything ? ” I asked.

“ No more than you want me to. Tell him yourself, just as much as you please, and I'll tell him no more. He won't ask, as a matter of fact.”

“ What's the matter ? ” Jem asked when he reached the verandah.

“ What do you say to coming back to Brest with me ? ” I asked.

“ What for ? ”

“ I should like your company, and the missus here says she'd like the trip.”

“ What are we going to do over there ? ”

“ Hunt for more bank notes in our spare time.”

“ Oh ! . . . We ain't going to get mixed up with any more policemen, are we ? ”

“ I don't think so.”

“ Honest ? All right, I'm on. You'll pack, Pam, won't you ? I hate packing.”

Pamela did the packing that same afternoon, and we left for Brest at mid-day next day, crossing from Plymouth by the night boat. She was in the highest spirits on landing next morning, but I thought I

detected some signs of nervousness, too. Perhaps she thought she'd been hasty.

After breakfast she started off with Jem to explore the town whilst I set out for Madame Auffret's. Miss Trimen was at home, and was glad to see me, but when the first greetings were over I thought she looked tired and worn. She was conscious of it, too.

"Working through this hot weather is trying," said she, as though answering an unspoken question. "I won't do it next year. August shall be my holiday."

"I think you're wise. Are you too tired to come out this evening? A friend and his wife are staying at the Continental with me, and we shall be delighted if Madame Auffret and yourself will join us at dinner."

She hesitated, and I wondered if the attentions of the French police had anything to do with her reluctance.

"If you're too tired——" I began.

"No, I'm not too tired. Only one gets into a groove here, and I'm getting quite shy of meeting people. But friends of yours, Mr. Voogdt. . . . Of course I'll come, with pleasure."

And in the evening the two women met. Miss Trimen brought a message of regret from Madame Auffret. Her husband's dinner was a sacred duty—stupidly, never having met the man, I hadn't thought of asking him, but resolved to show better manners next time. Perhaps it was just as well. Pamela West had come to meet Miss Trimen, not Madame Auffret, and the square party gave her a good opportunity of making her acquaintance.

It's trite but true to remark that women are strange creatures. Here had I brought Pamela Carthew West, British matron—of a sort—to examine and approve—at least I hoped she would approve—an unmarried

French girl. At worst I expected they would clash : Pamela's tomboy, rackety manner would shock Miss Trimen, or Marguerite Trimen's quietness become reserve and depress Pamela. At best—I don't know what I hoped for at best. That Pamela would like and patronize the girl as young married women do patronize unmated ones, I suppose. But I didn't expect her to play the little demure girl—without her tongue in her cheek for once—nor did I expect Marguerite Trimen to pet her. And yet that seemed to be the footing they were on, at once. They liked each other, that was plain, and I was glad to see it ; but there was an air of mutual understanding about them that perplexed me. Jem didn't see it, of course ; he wouldn't see anything he wasn't intended to ; but I thought I did. If Pamela made a remark, she seemed quite anxious for the other girl's acquiescence in what she said : if Marguerite Trimen passed the salt, she did it with a motherly air.

They went into the lounge before us after dinner, and when we joined them had made all manner of appointments for meetings during our stay. And yet there was no gush about it—not a trace. They were as coolly business-like as two men could be. I watched to see if they kissed at parting, and noticed that, though they did (which I hadn't expected), it was a one-sided affair. Miss Trimen stooped, and Pamela put up her cheek like a good little girl saying good-bye to a grown-up relation.

But when we got back to our sitting-room, she was a good little girl no longer. I never saw her in such a temper. She flew at me like a little wild cat.

"You fool," she said. "You fool! I'm ashamed of you!"

"Why—why, what's the matter?" I stammered,

taken all aback. As for Jem, he stared as though he thought we'd both gone mad.

"What's the matter, indeed! And I always thought you less of a fool than most men. You and your evidences—you make me sick. She's good. Good, I tell you. She's as sweet as sweet. I've never met a girl so good as that."

"You mean it?" I said. I could have kissed the little termagant.

"Mean it? Why, it's stamped all over her. She couldn't do a dirty action, that girl. Couldn't. Just couldn't. It'd kill her. Oh, you men—you helpless fools! You to hint ill of her——"

"I didn't."

"You did. You and your beastly evidence. You pretend to—to like her a lot—and you go nosing round and round the girl, grubbing in the dirt and splashing it on her. You aren't fit to tie her shoe-strings. To be doing that—you, of all men—when she's good and sweet and lovely—and alone and in trouble."

"Did she tell you she was in trouble?"

"Of course not. She isn't that sort; she puts it behind her out of sight, and smiles and is kind to people. That's the sort of woman she is."

"How do you know she's in trouble, then?"

"For the same reason that I know she's good. Because I've sat by her side for an hour. And you, you that have met her half a dozen times, you didn't know that. And you think yourself clever. You're a common fool, Austin Voogdt. Yes, and worse than that."

She sniffed, and then began to cry, and, Jem West catching my eye, I left the room, and went to bed feeling like a criminal, wondering gloomily what I had done to upset her like that!

CHAPTER XIV

A QUESTION ANSWERED

I DIDN'T need Pamela West to tell me Miss Trimen was in trouble. Innocent or guilty, it's no pleasant experience to be shadowed by the police, as I felt sure she must be.

But after three days I came to the conclusion that our own detective force had a good deal to learn from their French colleagues. We went excursions, by river and sea and land, and never once, in train or tram, or on boat or steamer or open hillside, could I detect that she was followed. Yet she was worried. No doubt about that. Now that Pamela had opened my eyes, I could see a dozen evidences of it daily. Little moments when her attention flagged : quick flushes and fadings of colour on her cheeks at unexpected questions or remarks : trifling forgetfulnesses. Yet she was kind and pleasant always, and to nobody more so than to little Pamela West. It was pretty to see them together, always in the same relation as at first. Pamela might have been a petted younger sister, though, I suppose, as a matter of fact, she was a year or two older than the other girl. Even Jem—not by any means a student of psychology—noticed and remarked on it one day at Le Faou, whither we had gone up the Rade de Brest on a hired motor boat. The girls had gone ashore in advance, leaving us to adjust some minor engine trouble.

"Pam's fallen in love with your Miss Trimen," he said. "Rum thing, isn't it? She's generally ready to squabble with other girls."

"Um," said I.

"What do you think of her?"

"Of which?"

"Miss Trimen."

"I'm inclined to agree with Pamela," I said.

"Eh?" said he, open-mouthed. "D'ye mean that, Austin?"

"Yes, I do."

"What! That you've—you're sweet on the girl?"

"Yes."

"Straight?"

"Yes, you clucking hen," I almost shouted at him.

"Well, I'm dashed! I always thought you were a born bachelor."

"So I was born a bachelor, you idiot," I snapped. "So were you, weren't you? I was also born without teeth, and as I've grown out of that, I suppose I can grow out of the other thing."

After that it was positively trying to be with him and Miss Trimen together, he strove so to get into the background, and to seem oblivious of our presence. It fell to Pamela often to save the situation. But for all that her methods were less apparent, she was even more bent on matchmaking than was her clumsy husband. But I could stand it; the three of us were in the same mind, for once.

That September was very fine, as though for our especial benefit. There were sharp, clear mornings which braced and invigorated, with bright sunny days and velvet-warm dark evenings to follow. Speaking for myself, I never enjoyed a holiday more in my life, and as the days passed I thought Miss Trimen grew

happier, feeling, as she must have done, that she was with friends who thought a lot of her. As for Pamela West, one could hardly recognize in her the peppery little girl she had been before her marriage. On our excursions she sunned herself like a cat under a wall, until I teased her and swore she was growing fat and lazy.

And all the time—though it had come to seem a minor affair in face of our pleasuring—Jem and myself were looking out for Schofield notes. We made no more big hauls in Brest; whether the supply had ceased, or whether the police had been ahead of us, no one could say, but we only got two in the first week we were there. But every day we took English notes out with us, and changed them in whatever country town we lunched at, and half a dozen excursions yielded seven notes. One we got at Chateaudun, to the southward, one at Landerneau, due east, three at Morlaix, still farther to the eastward; one at Lesneven, to the north-east, and one at Landivisiau, on the Morlaix Road. However they had reached Brest, they seemed to be getting out of it along the great national main road to Paris.

At this stage it occurred to me I had a reasonable excuse for writing my inspector at Scotland Yard. After reporting the discovery and numbers of the notes, I thought I'd risk a snub by asking for a letter of introduction to their representative at Brest, assuming that they had one on the spot. I never really thought I should get it, but I did, and then discovered that I had been seeing the man daily. He was actually staying at the Continental, where, watching him at meals, I had taken him for a French commercial traveller. Dark, with a close-clipped toothbrush of a black moustache, he had a Jewish profile,

suffered slightly from adenoids, and spoke English with a marked Cockney accent, though he was, I learned, of French nationality. Anything less like the conventional idea of a sleuthhound I never saw.

But he knew his business. On my presenting the letter of introduction, he showed such a complete knowledge of all our recent doings that I felt a sincere respect for him.

"Have you been watching us?" I asked, surprised.

"No, sir, not specially. But I'm in touch with the French police, and one watches everybody as far as possible."

"Don't you waste a lot of time that way?"

"Sometimes. That young lady who goes with you—Miss Trimen—I wasted a good deal of time over her. And yourself, too."

"Yes?" I said, trying not to look too interested.

"Yes. When I first came over here I was hunting up your antecedents—whilst you were being watched in London. Learning that Miss Trimen had been on the *Aspasie*, and that you had been about a good deal together, we naturally thought it possible that the note had got from Schofield's cabin to you viâ the young lady."

"But I'd given all information."

He shrugged his shoulders. "We weren't to know you were telling the truth. So we set a watch on Miss Trimen—I tell you, sir, that young lady never went in or out, or put her hat on or took it off, or sewed a button on her glove, but it was reported to me. The French police are very thorough."

"Well, you wasted your time," I said.

"Entirely. I mentioned the case to show you how much trouble one sometimes takes for nothing. The young lady had no more to do with the bank notes

than you have. Not so much, for you've had one in your hands, and I doubt if she ever did."

"How could you tell that?"

He smiled. "The police here aren't hampered as we are in England. What they say, goes. Every penny she spent was accounted for. Every article of clothing she owns was examined, without her knowledge. Why, sir, I could tell you how many pairs of stockings the young lady's got."

"I don't want to know," I said shortly. "It's a damnable liberty. Your trade's a rotten and disgusting one. I'd rather sweep a crossing, myself."

And off I went in a rage. But my heart was singing in me. She was innocent. That was all that mattered.

Pamela's ideas as to match-making differed materially from her husband's, but they were none the less efficacious for that. Her plan was to be always in the way; to prevent a *tête-à-tête* at any cost; and so quicken one's interest and curiosity. If she was about, I could never get a moment alone with the girl, and so—as I imagine she calculated—was the more anxious to make the most of the few opportunities I had. That night one came my way. Miss Trimen had dined with us, and Pamela, after announcing that we were all going to see her home, pleaded a headache after dinner. Jem fussed around her, of course, and it was left to me to act as escort to Miss Trimen. On the way to the Auffrets' I asked her to marry me, and she refused, finally and definitely. I tried to shake her determination.

"Is there anyone else?"

"Anyone that wants to marry me, do you mean? No. No one."

"Do you want to marry anyone else?"

"No. No, indeed."

"Do you like me?"

"Very much. More than anyone I know. And you saved my life."

"I asked you not to say that; but now say it as often as you please—never forget it, Marguerite—if it'll help you to change your mind."

"I never do forget it—and I cannot change my mind."

"But I love you," I said. "And I must marry you; and I will. I want you, I tell you. Nothing else matters."

She stopped—we were just at the corner of the rue St. Mathieu—and looked at me steadily. It was a dark evening, but there was a young moon, and though her face showed but dimly I could see she was in earnest.

"I was afraid of this," she said simply. "I saw you liked me. I believed you came here to find me—and I was glad. Believe me, I was glad and proud that you should want to see me again. But I may not marry you."

"May not," said I, hopefully. "May not. That sounds better. Would you, if you could, then?"

"I would."

"What prevents it?"

She shook her head. "I cannot."

I argued with her; entreated; begged; insisted; but it was no use. Always we came round in a circle to the essential point that she wouldn't marry me. Why? Because she couldn't. The hour was late, and I had to let her go like that, and went back to the hotel angry and depressed.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN THE TRAIN STOPPED

THE excursions were continued, but without me, henceforward. I had work to do, and left the other three together whilst I did it. It was just as well, perhaps. I didn't want to force my society on the girl after her refusal, so she and Pamela had the more opportunities of petting each other. Jem didn't count, being a married man, and stolid at that.

We met every night at dinner, and generally I saw her home—once or twice alone—but didn't make any further reference to her refusing me. It was no good wearying the girl by insistence on the subject just now. I had enough to do with this bank-note puzzle, and I had some idea—perhaps due to Pamela's outburst—that once that business was cleared up, I might get another answer when I spoke again of marriage. As things were, everything seemed vague and unsatisfactory, and, having the notion in my head that the Schofield business once solved and put aside out of the way the road would be clearer to my girl's acceptance, I was the more resolved to get on with my search.

I had a thousand pounds placed to my account in the Brest branch of the *Crédit Orléannais*, and got to changing it for French money in earnest. Daily I made some journey or another, all over *Finistère*, and nearly every day I managed to get hold of one or

more of the stolen notes. In these country districts the wreck of the *Aspasie* was pretty well forgotten ; the affairs of Bernard Schofield, *créancier anglais*, had never excited much interest, and the notes seemed to be circulating freely. Every night in my room I would compare the notes I had procured during the day with the list, and each morning paid into the bank all those whose numbers did not appear therein, only keeping back the stolen ones.

On a map of Finistère, torn from my *Brest Touriste*, I marked with a cross each place where I had found a note, and, as the crosses began to crowd the map, discovered that they were thickest in one particular district—that lying between Brest and Morlaix. South of the Brest-Morlaix-Paris road—beside which runs the Western Railway of France—and to the eastward of Morlaix, they were few and far between ; but in the hamlets lying between the railway and the Channel coast one or more of them came to hand almost every day. Such an absurd hypothesis as that Schofield had taken genuine notes with him, that they had washed off the wreck, been blown across Channel, and drifted ashore here on the nearest French beach, would have fitted the facts exactly. If such an impossible thing had happened, I should have expected to find them just as I was finding them now—circulating openly, in all good faith, in rather large quantities over just such a circumscribed area near the coast.

If, as seemed likely, the detectives had a fixed idea that the bulk of the plunder was hidden in Brest, they were wrong. Whether the notes were drifting into the city from the countryside, or *vice versa*, I couldn't say ; but I felt pretty sure by this time that more notes were outside the town than in.

The plain truth is, that I found too many notes :

they muddled and confused me. One here and there might have given me a line to direct me—whether rightly or wrongly—in my search. I should have gone from one to another like a schoolboy playing hound in a paper-chase. But what sort of game would be a paper-chase where the scent was distributed equally over acres of country? By the end of a week I had over forty listed notes of a hundred francs each, and they were so equally distributed all over this district that it was impossible to detect their place of origin. No one village or town was distinguished by a higher proportion of them, or displayed a suspicious freedom from their presence. For the moment I was half inclined to report the facts as I saw them to my friend the detective at Brest, and let him do the puzzling; but in the end decided to hold my tongue. If—it was impossible, of course—but if there was any chance of the business affecting Miss Trimen, I preferred to keep the information to myself.

None the less I was getting no further, either with my search or my love-making, and when, on the weather breaking, Jem and Pamela decided to go home, I announced my intention of going with them. The night before we left, I went home alone with Miss Trimen, and told her I should return again to ask her to marry me.

“Don’t. Don’t,” she said. “It makes me so unhappy. I can’t marry you. What is the use?”

“You are going to marry me,” I said. “Understand that. Now, we’ll drop the subject for the time. May I write you?”

“No. Better not.”

“Not at all?”

“Not a regular correspondence. If you write—when you’ve anything definite to say, I—I shall be

glad to hear from you. Believe that. But not to make a regular thing of it. What is the use? We can never be anything more to each other than we are now."

"Very well," I told her. "What you say shall be done. Good-bye."

We shook hands and parted; and all the comfort I had was that her voice had shaken in farewell, and I thought she was near crying.

From Plymouth, Jem and Pamela went straight to London, leaving me behind. I suggested their staying a few days, but the fine autumn weather had broken, and they were for home. In their turn they pressed me to come with them, but I felt sure they'd rather be alone, and so pleaded as an excuse that I wanted another talk with Mr. George Peters, and saw them off at the station, promising to call on them the moment I got back to London. Pamela, who had almost wept at leaving Marguerite, was very down in the mouth at the failure of her match-making, but I did my best to reassure her about this last, and, I think, sent the little lady off more hopeful than she had been since leaving Brest.

Mr. Peters had seen nothing of his friend, the crafty steward—not that I ever expected he had—and so had no more information to impart. After a quarter of an hour in his office, I bade him farewell, climbed to the Hoe, and there sat smoking and reviewing the events of the last four months.

The result of an hour's hard thinking was to bring me back to the conclusion I had formed at Brest in August—that it was useless trying to see the trend of the game before all the cards were on the table. Somebody hadn't finished playing yet—these hundred-franc notes proved that—and as I was shy of inquiring from

whose hand those particular cards were falling, search that way was barred. It remained, then, to go over the cards already played. I couldn't be sure I had seen all of them yet.

That afternoon I went to the office of the *Western Morning Mail*, introduced myself, found one or two men there who knew men I knew, and was made free of the place. I spent an hour among the back files, and that night was able to take home one complete file on promising to return it early next morning, so after dinner retired to my room with unlimited coffee, and sat down to a hard night's reading.

My window faced westward across the Sound, and down Channel towards the Lizard, where the *Aspasie's* wreck had changed my whole life, turned its drifting to set purpose, and amongst other things let me in for this night's vigil. It was coming on to blow, with every now and again a spatter and slash of autumn rain upon the window, and moaning in the chimney. I stripped to shirt, trousers and slippers, stoked up the fire, set the coffee near at hand, and started to read every line of every issue for four months of the bulkiest provincial paper in England.

I believe I never missed a single line. Even the advertisements were checked over one by one, and each had a moment's undivided attention. The coffee kept me awake, and thoughts of Brest and all that depended on my hunt kept me keen. From the first scare-heads about the *Aspasie* disaster to the report of the last meeting of creditors, I plodded through one long column after another. When I had finished the papers and the coffee, it was half-past three in the morning, the gale was rising, the beat and trickle of the rain on the window panes insistent, and I had found one more link—only a tiny casual link, appa-

rently—between the *Aspasie* disaster, and the town of Brest.

Keenly as I was reading, I believe I might have passed over the paragraph if the word Brest hadn't caught my eye. Then I read it carefully, threw the paper containing it apart from the others, and went on reading till the finish. When all the others were read and laid aside, I picked it up and read the paragraph again, my eyelids hot and sticky for want of sleep, but my brain as active as ever it has been in my life.

Again I had to thank the Police Court news for my information. It was a small paragraph in the issue of the day after the wreck, unimportant in itself, and crowded still more into a corner by the long columns from Falmouth dealing with the subject of the *Aspasie*.

All it told me was that Etienne Bossard, a French sailor, aged 22, of 272, rue Penheld, Brest, had been charged with being drunk and disorderly, and with improper use of the communication cord on the non-stop Ocean Special which took the *Aspasie's* passengers from Paddington to Plymouth the afternoon of the wreck. He had stopped the train between Dawlish and Teignmouth, for which he was fined £5 and costs.

It was the first news I had heard of anything unusual happening to the train. Every mention of Schofield's flight that had come to my ears so far was based on the assumption that the train had gone from Paddington to Plymouth without a stop. The obvious suggestion was that Schofield had left the train when this Bossard had stopped it. It was too obvious, of course; and I dismissed the idea from my mind the moment it took form there. None the less, I resolved to find out all I could about the business next day, and, sore-eyed, and tired out, went to bed, and slept till nine in the morning.

As luck would have it, my first question—had Schofield left the train?—was answered at once. When I returned the file of papers to the offices of the *Western Mail*, I fell in talk with one or two of the men there, and, twisting the conversation round to the subject of the *Aspasie*, asked point blank if it was certain that Schofield had actually embarked? Oh yes. They were sure of that. No doubt about it whatever. I wanted to know how they could be so positive. There hadn't been any inquest on Schofield himself, for his body hadn't been found, so how could any evidence have been forthcoming as to his embarkation?

That drew the very answer I wanted. Ah, ha! I might be from Fleet Street, but I mustn't think they were altogether duffers in the provinces. There was one little point on which they were ahead of me. Did I know that the special train which brought the *Aspasie's* passengers to Plymouth had been stopped *en route*?

"Where did that happen?"

"Ah, ha!" again. "Hodge, let's have another look at those files. Here. Here you are. In the very file you've now brought back, Mr. Voogdt. I bet you didn't notice this par about the French chap who stopped the Ocean Special. Did you know?"

I pored over it, as though taken aback.

"Well," I said at length, "I don't see that's any evidence of Schofield's embarking. If anything, it points the other way."

"Exactly. That's what struck us. We had a man with a photo of Schofield down aboard the tender almost before that French chap had paid his fine. And four or five of the tender's crew swore to the photo. No possibility of mistake. Besides, Mr.

Voogdt, the notes were aboard the ship. Forged or genuine, nobody could have put them there but Schofield himself, eh ? ”

I joined very heartily in the laughter against myself, though I confess I failed to see that the discovery of forged notes aboard the *Aspasie* rendered it impossible that Schofield could have left the train before Plymouth. However, the evidence of the tender's crew was pretty conclusive that he had embarked, and I don't think I'd ever taken the other idea really seriously ; but it was news to me that the train had been stopped at all, and so many queer things had happened in connexion with the case that every new piece of information, no matter how unimportant it might seem, deserved to be investigated. Of course Schofield had embarked. No doubt about it whatever ; and yet——

From the newspaper office I drifted to the neighbourhood of the railway station, to stroll idly in side streets, searching for a point of attack. A small, but fairly clean beer-house, situated conveniently just around the corner from Millbay terminus, displayed over its woven wire blind a poster relating to some forthcoming concert in aid of a railwayman's orphanage, and I entered and laid in wait in one corner ensconced behind a pint of ale and the morning's paper.

There was no one in the taproom when I went in, but between half-past eleven and one o'clock the room was never empty, and nine-tenths of the customers wore the green corduroy or blue cloth uniforms of the railway company. Mostly they brought food with them, washing it down with half-pints of mild ale. I got into conversation—railway gossip—with one or two of them, and soon, by way of the subject of brakes and their efficiency, round to cases of stopping trains

in emergencies. From that it was a short step to the use and abuse of the communication cord on express trains, and the pains and penalties attendant thereon.

The men were in a hurry, which was all in my favour. As each finished his mid-day snack he nodded, said good morning, and went ; but another man took his place, and the conversation never flagged for an hour. The Bossard case was cited :—" Better if the bloomin' train had stopped there in the tunnel all night. 'Twould ha' saved some lives," said one sympathizer—and I learnt that one of the guards on the special, one Richard Ardleigh by name, was a Devonport man. Also that he was a teetotaler, and that his evidence against the Frenchman had been biassed by the fact. "'Else do ye think the chap 'ud ha' been fined the full penalty like he was ? " demanded my informant.

Towards one o'clock the last of the men departed, and, returning to the hotel for my lunch, I procured a Devonport Directory, and soon found the man I wanted—" Ardleigh, R., railway guard, 16 Damerel Street, Devonport."

Damerel Street proved to be an interminable avenue of yellow brick houses, all exactly alike, yet each betraying some signs of individuality in its tenants. No. 16 had spotless window curtains, and a newly painted front door, bearing a highly polished plate with its owner's name. Mrs. Ardleigh, as clean as her curtains and brass plate, informed me civilly that her husband was from home.

" When will he be here ? "

" Well, he takes up the two-forty, afternoons, from Millbay, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and brings down the eleven-fifty, mornings, from Pad-

dington, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays," she informed me, with the pride befitting the wife of that aristocrat, an express guard.

To-day was Wednesday. "If I call to-morrow at six in the evening, shall I find him at home?"

"I should think so, sir."

"Then I'll make an appointment," said I, and, giving her my card, took my leave.

Near the offices of the *Western Mail* I saw on the opposite pavement my friend the reporter with whom I had been talking that morning. Waving a hand, I was about to pass on my way when he signed to me to stop, and crossed the road to meet me, an official-looking pamphlet in his hand.

"Funny thing, coincidence," said he. "You know when you came in this morning, we were talking of Schofield? This afternoon the boss handed me this—the Board of Trade report on the wreck of the *Aspasie*."

"Where was the inquiry held?"

"Southampton."

"How did your chief get hold of it?" I had experienced the difficulty of procuring official reports before now.

"His brother's a Marine assessor—Younger Brother of Trinity, and all that, and he sat at the inquiry. Knowing I was interested in the case, he lent it to me for a day or two. Good printing and good paper; but no literary style about it, eh? That's Government all over."

He put it into my hand, and I ran the pages through, catching sight here and there of names I knew. Aaron Fletcher had been called as a witness—Smikey, Charles Collis——

"I should like to have a look at this."

"Well, you can, if you want to. I shan't have time

to read it to-night. If you'll be sure to let me have it again to-morrow."

"I promise," I said. "And many thanks."

"That's all right. Welcome. Where are you staying?"

"At the Royal."

"Right. Take it, then." He hurried off, leaving the pamphlet in my hand.

I didn't really feel any particular interest in the wreck itself, now. It was some time since it had happened, and, once over, I had done my best to forget all its ghastly details. The dead were buried, the survivors sent to their destinations, the liner salved; and instead of the Schofield affair being a mere incident in the horrors of the wreck, the two events had changed places in my mind. The Schofield business, inasmuch as it appeared to touch or threaten Marguerite Trimen, was all important, and the wreck seemed only to count as my introduction to the girl and this mysterious business in which she seemed involved.

None the less, the pamphlet was interesting in itself, as simple and baldly-phrased narratives of great events must always be, if only by virtue of their simplicity. There is no touching up, no striving after literary effect in an English Government report. Though I had been on the spot, had actually been engaged in serving up these very facts for popular consumption, this thing read like a new story. The recapitulation of evidence; the direct questions and remarks of the president of the court and his assessors; the answers of witnesses, now willing, now reluctant; the dissection and elucidation of fact after fact seemed to reconstruct the tragedy for me far more clearly than my own memory could have done. The thing was coldly matter-of-fact as a legal document; the court of inquiry might have been in-

vestigating the conditions of small holdings or the working of County Courts, so cool and unbiassed was it. The members of the court, skilled seamen all, displayed no excitement, no regrets, no surprise, no emotion whatever, that could interfere with their one purpose—to thresh out the evidence and get at the causes of the wreck.

Julius Bouts, steerage passenger, told how he shared his bottle of spirits with the look-out, and retired from the witness-stand without a word of comment on his behaviour. The look-out man, examined, admitted the drinking, denied he was asleep, and then contradicted himself by saying he was waked by the ship's sirens after she had taken the ledge. He had run aft, been ordered into one of the first boats to get away, and was here giving his evidence, no one blaming him for the wreck or even reprimanding him for perjury. No one suggested hanging the brute, or imprisoning him, or punishing him at all ; they treated him as impersonally as though some faulty rivets in the ship's bottom had been as much to blame for the disaster as he—as though, indeed, he were no more than a faulty rivet himself. It was inhuman, this calm, logical, persistent questioning.

Witness succeeded witness, dates and times and places were checked by this question or by that. No single piece of evidence but was corroborated wherever possible. A simple question addressed to Aaron Fletcher checked a statement already made by the head keeper of the Lizard Light. Charles Collis and Smique, evidently ignorant of the drift of the cross-examination, each in his turn vouched for the other's evidence and supported their skipper in his. One after another each witness added some fact, small or great, till the evidence fitted together like the dovetailed stones of a

lighthouse, not to be upset or contradicted by any criticism or contradiction whatsoever.

With the slow, steady accumulation of facts, facts, facts, each directly, or indirectly, or even distantly bearing on the wreck, it seemed when the court rose that not one word could be added to the evidence it had considered, and by comparison with the certainty of that evidence the wording of its report seemed weak and tame.

The court finds ——. The court is of opinion that ——. The court recommends ——. If the court had asserted, insisted, commanded, it would have been more fitting.

Against such method, such careful thrashing-out of evidence, such weighing and corroboration of this statement and that, how could one oppose a trifling incident, almost unnoticed at the time and by now half forgotten? Yet, unless I was mistaken, one little error—doubtless an unimportant matter—had crept even into this clearly worded, unequivocal report.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GUARD'S STORY

AS I say, the proceedings of the court of inquiry upon the wreck suggested nothing so much as the exact, inhuman working of a machine. Man after man passed through its hands ; sailors and firemen, deck-officers and engineers ; steward, saloon passenger, emigrant, lighthouse-keeper, coastguard, salvage-hand, or what not, and from each, without passion or excitement, it extorted his version of the disaster. Coldly and patiently it sifted each man's statements, separating little grains of certainty from the inexactitudes due to prejudice, to fear, to forgetfulness or excitement, slowly adding fact to fact until its work was complete.

None the less, little touches of human interest peeped out here and there from between the printed lines. The report lent itself to no such unbusinesslike incidents—indeed, not being journalism, it discouraged them. Newspaper statements as to applause in court, or visible agitation on the part of any witness under examination, were conspicuously absent. Romance was bidden wait outside the court-room door, or, if she entered, to hide her face ; but now and again one caught a hint that she was there all the same. For all that the court bent its brows over facts and figures, navigators' observations, mathematical formulæ, times and dates and distances, and measurements of beam

and length and draught, other things that refused to be so squared and measured—Life and Death, love and hatred, bravery and panic fear—would not be denied, but showed their tragic faces time and again.

There was an English fireman who had spent his life in liners' stokeholes—preferably foreign ships, "because the grub was better,"—and to him as to others the wreck had brought a new experience. Escaping from the glow of his furnace door to the chaos and uproar on the upper decks, he had entered the first-class smoking-room, where the steward had informed him the ship was sinking, and then fled and left him free of the spirit decanters in the bar. "I 'ad some, too," he said quite simply. "I 'elped myself."

Cross-examination, designed to discover whether he had drunk enough to make his evidence unreliable, only proved that his memory of the wreck was abnormally clear. He had no imagination, his memory was keen, and his evidence not to be shaken. The wreck had stamped itself for ever on his mind, not because of the deaths around him, or because his own life was saved—there was nothing so unfamiliar as all that in violent death or the chances of the sea—nor even because he had been able to help himself to varied and unlimited drinks. Far more thrilling than any of these, he had caught sight of himself, black and filthy with the grime of the stokehole, in a full-length mirror with around him an incongruous setting of luxury,—thick carpets, polished woodwork, stained-glass, snowy napery, velvet and gold. He had never seen a full-length mirror before, and the upholstery of the saloon had made him forget that his life was in danger. "I never knew they 'ad such places aboard ship," said he, who had been to sea for a living all his life.

Then there was an assessor on the bench who fell

short of the ideal machine. One guessed him old, getting past his work, once a martinet, and now in his old age fussy and very jealous of his position as an assessor to the Board of Trade. Imagined contradiction roused him at once to senile obstinacy, and attempts to suppress or evade any of his questions, no matter how purposeless they might be, meant the repetition of that question until from sheer weariness his colleagues gave in and shelved the business of the court until he could be satisfied. One could almost see him, quavery, impotent, full of childish assertions of his own dignity and importance, a rattling and worn-out wheel of the machine of Government.

Yet it was due to him that I was able to detect the one slight error in the evidence. One of the keepers of Lewanick Light had been called as a witness. I forget why—some evidence as to the distance between the *Aspasie's* course, and the tail of the Manacles I think it was—and in the course of his evidence the man referred to his "mate."

The aged assessor demanding which of his mates he meant, the keeper informed the court that he only had one man with him on the night of the wreck. At this the aged assessor was very much upset. Trinity House regulations demanded the presence of three men in an isolated light, and he wanted to know the reason why the Elder Brethren had been flouted in this way?

The reason was at once forthcoming, and it pinned my attention at once. The third keeper had gone ashore the night before the wreck to see his doctor, he having an abscess in his face. His relief man came off the day after the wreck, and the aged assessor, having been reminded that this chance of illness was the very reason for the employment of three men to

do the work which could easily be done by one, the matter dropped, the court called another witness, and the inquiry was resumed.

It was the mention of an abscess in the third light-keeper's face that attracted my notice. When I climbed into Lewanick Lighthouse the day after the wreck, hadn't I caught sight of a third man through the window of the living-room? True, it was some months since, and I hadn't taken any particular notice at the time, being greatly perturbed and excited about the disaster. I shouldn't have cared to give sworn evidence about the matter myself; after the terrors of that sleepless night, and the poor dead bodies on the ship, on the beach below, and even up there in the gallery around the light, my nerves were all unstrung, and besides, I had been drinking raw spirits to dull me to the horrors around me, and brace me up to do my work. No, certainly I couldn't pledge myself on oath to any of the events of that night or the morning after.

Yet surely the younger keeper had told me the third man I saw had an abscess in his face. That much seemed pretty clear in my memory, and now this report in a measure confirmed it. But I had never set foot in Lewanick Cove till the morning after the wreck, and if I had seen the third keeper sitting over the stove with his face tied up, it was obvious he had not gone ashore for treatment the night before. I tried to reconstruct the room from my memory of that careless glance through the window, but it was no good. The only picture I could conjure up of Lewanick Cove was that of Marguerite Trimen's pale and weary face stooping over the huddle of children in the boat, and telling them fairy stories to keep them from looking at the dead man in the shallow water alongside.

Doubtless it was unimportant. I could remember clearly enough how the two keepers I had spoken with were agitated about the wreck. Very likely their memory, as hazy as my own, was answerable for this little slip, which after all had nothing to do with my search into the perplexities of the Schofield affair.

At six next day I called at Damerel Street, and found Mr. Richard Ardleigh, express guard, waiting my arrival in that temple of the lower middle and artizan classes, the Best Room. It was spotless, of course—spotless and depressing. The window hadn't been open since the house was built, most likely, and it was furnished mainly with antimacassars, wool mats, and wax flowers under shades. Mr. Ardleigh harmonized with his surroundings exactly: being entirely British—clean, civil, and taciturn—and not to be opened without good reason. For the first quarter of an hour it was he who did the catechizing, ringing the changes on variants of one question, What business of mine was the stopping of the *Aspasie* ocean special? Saying I was a pressman only shut him up like an oyster: he owed a duty to his employers, the railway company, and he didn't see why he should give information to the papers about their affairs. He wasn't going to get himself into trouble by having his statements in print. Well, if I wasn't going to print them, what did I want them for?

I got sick of it at last, and so tried the politician's trick of undermining his confidence in his mates.

"Look here, Mr. Ardleigh," I said. "There were other officials aboard that train besides yourself, and if you won't give me this information I want, I shall go to them. I'm not going to print a word you say, and the name of my informant won't transpire, whether I get what I want from you or the other guard or the driver or fireman. I'm prepared to pay two pounds

for the information, and if you won't give it, you know very well one of the others will. You don't pick up two pounds for five minutes' talk every day of your life."

He made some excuse to go into the kitchen, probably to consult his wife, for she came back in his place to demand three pounds.

"Not another penny, ma'am," I told her, pretending to reach for my hat. "The fireman of the train'll tell me all I want to know for ten shillings."

"Then why don't you go to him?" she demanded.

"Because my time's limited, and I don't know where he lives. But I can soon find out"; and I turned to the door.

That did it. Mr. Ardleigh re-entered the room, and, after a dozen assurances that nothing he said should be used against him, told the story I wanted.

And when he had finished I was exactly as wise as I was before, for he only corroborated the fact that Schofield had not left the train, and that I knew already.

"We were due out of Paddington at one o'clock," he said, "and got away on time. It was a short train; luggage van in front, then a dining saloon, then a composite coach, first and third, with a corridor leading to the saloon, an' then my van. There was twenty-seven passengers—that chap Schofield, the banker which ran away, he was one of 'em. I remembered his face perfectly well when his picture was in the papers afterwards. The Frenchman what stopped the train scrambled aboard just as we was drawing out. I smelt he'd been drinking, but he seemed quiet enough. He said he thought we was the twelve-fifty, an' as he had a ordinary third-class ticket to Plymouth, I thought as well not to make any fuss. I might ha' got into trouble if I'd delayed

the train for him. The mid-day traffic is very thick at Paddington from June to September, and the company don't thank you for keepin' it about. So I shut him into a empty third-class compartment an' told him he'd very likely be detained at Plymouth for inquiries.

"On the journey I looked in at him once or twice when I passed along the corridor, an' mostly he seemed to be asleep, so far as I could make out. When we left Dawlish, an' got on the stretch of single line beside the sea—it cuts through five little tunnels before you come to Teignmouth sea-wall—I was in my van keepin' a look out for signals. That bit of single line is a proper strangler for the through traffic, an' our orders is to waste no time in getting clear of it. But just as we ran into Parson's tunnel—the last and longest of the five—the communication cord was pulled like somebody was being murdered. The driver he shut off steam, but the bell went again like mad, an' both the driver an' me we clapped on the vacuum brakes, and brought her up in fifty yards, I should think. I wonder we didn't split a tire somewhere, bringing her up all standing like that. In the scare an' hurry, I thought the signalman in the Parson's tunnel box must ha' let a up-train into the tunnel in front of us, an' before we stopped I was at the door meanin' to jump if I heard another engine comin'. But nothin' happened except the communication bell kept on ringin', and when I started along the corridor to the front van to find out what was the matter, I found my Frenchman leanin' out of the window, and hanging on to the cord with one hand. He was that drunk he couldn't stand, and on the seat beside him was a half empty bottle of whisky. The carriage fair stunk of it. I'm a total abstainer myself"—He paused as though expecting comment on the fact.

I merely nodded. "Yes. Go on."

"Well, that's about all. Me an' the saloon-steward we took the chap back into my van, an' I left the steward in charge of him while I run forward to give my driver right away. When we got to Millbay we was eight minutes late, an' I give the chap in charge. He was fined the full five pounds an' costs."

"Could he speak English?"

"Enough to make hisself understood."

"Did anyone leave the train in the tunnel when it stopped?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Certain sure. Who could ha' left it? Twenty-seven passengers come aboard at Paddington an' then the Frenchman, an' twenty-eight tickets I collected just before we run into Plymouth."

"Could anyone have hidden in the train?"

"No. An' if they had, they couldn't ha' left it there, of all places. The lights was on, owing to the tunnels, an' what with them shining on the walls of the tunnels it was as light outside the carriages as what it was inside 'em. An' the passengers was all at the windows wonderin' why we'd stopped with such a jerk. Why, a cat couldn't ha' jumped out o' that train without bein' seen."

I handed over my two pounds and left, very dissatisfied with myself. The Bossard incident had nothing to do with Schofield, evidently, and I had thrown my money away. Worse than that, I was up against a brick wall, whichever way I turned. If removing suspicion from Marguerite Trinen was to be done by me, it looked as though she had a poor chance of being cleared. I had accomplished exactly nothing at all, except for finding some of the genuine notes in the district where she lived, and I wanted nobody to tell me that was poor

service enough. I wouldn't pursue that line of search. To buy stolen notes at their face value isn't a paying business. I might spend every penny I had in the world doing that, and still be no nearer doing her any good. Besides, it led nowhere, or rather, to be honest, I was afraid where it might lead.

As for the results of my inquiries this side, they were merely ludicrous. Peters had failed me ; the steward who had passed the forged notes on him had disappeared ; and no more notes, good or bad, had come to light in England. Misled by the fact that this drunken Bossard had given a Brest address, I had wasted a couple of sovereigns in ascertaining that he had nothing whatever to do with the business. I had been put under police observation, and only escaped arrest more by luck and barefaced impudence than anything else. I had scared my best pal by bringing him too intimately into touch with Scotland Yard—and what else had I done ? Just nothing, beyond making sure that Schofield had embarked—a fact which nobody had ever doubted for a moment.

Where were the bulk of the real notes ? That was a question I wouldn't even ask myself—because I knew, and wanted to keep my eyes shut. They were somewhere in Finistère. I could cover them with the tip of my finger on the map. They were somewhere to the north of the Brest-Morlaix road. They were near Brest—a lot too near Brest to please me—and no one was more anxious than myself to forget the fact. I didn't want to know where they were : I wanted to know how they got there.

And I couldn't make the remotest guess. Yes, I could—one guess, but that guess I wouldn't entertain. I knew one person who might have taken those notes across the Channel, and if I had seen her with the parcel in her hand aboard the Brest-Plymouth steamer, I

would have denied the evidence of my own eyes. None the less, every alternative possibility led to nothing. Peters' steward didn't take them, for his notes were forged: Bossard had nothing to do with them, for no one had left the train in Parson's tunnel. Every irregular occurrence that had attracted my attention was explained away in quite an ordinary manner—a small scamp uttering forged notes in one case, and a drunken sailor on the spree in the other. To suspect either Peters or Ardleigh of complicity was ridiculous: both men had plain honesty in every line of their faces.

Every irregular occurrence was explained. No, not every one. I had nearly overlooked one little conflict of evidence. It was a small matter, only resting on a very illusory memory of my own, and it was very doubtful whether it was worth while to have it explained away. If I saw a third man in Lewanick Light, why had the lighthouse-keeper told a lie at the inquiry?

For the life of me I couldn't see what possible bearing it could have on the Schofield business. If he had lied—and I was bound to admit that if he, face to face, had contradicted me by telling me I had seen no third man, I should have believed him—if he had lied, it was probably on account of some small matter of neglected duty. Most likely he, or one of his mates, had broken some unimportant regulation of the Trinity Brethren, and the little lie was meant to hide the fact. None the less, it was an irregularity—the only one in that unimpeachable report—and it was the only irregularity I hadn't yet heard explained away. . . .

After all, Falmouth wasn't far, and I'd nothing else to do. If ever there was a wild-goose chase, this was one; but I'd go. I returned the Board of Trade report to my friend at the *Western Mail* that night, and set out for Falmouth by the first train next morning.

CHAPTER XVII

AT THE WHITE LION

FALMOUTH in early October, deserted by visitors, with a south-west gale blowing, and its streets cleared every hour or so by squalls of driving rain, looked a very different town from the sunny watering-place I had left last June. I should have liked to seek shelter in the most comfortable hotel, but, having time on the slow journey from Plymouth to consider the matter of the lighthouse-keeper, decided that wouldn't do, so left my bag at the station, and went down towards the waterside, hoping against hope for that extinct resting-place of a former age, a comfortable English tavern.

Since I had gone to the expense and trouble of coming to Falmouth, I might as well set about my business in a sensible manner. If it was a wild-goose chase, there was no need to import any further absurdity into it. And to stay at a good hotel, now probably almost deserted, would have been absurd. It was courting attention, and when one desires to find out why a gentleman has committed perjury in a court of inquiry, one doesn't set about it with a blare of trumpets.

For I had come to the conclusion that perjury was the word. The more I thought it over, the more certain I felt that I had seen a third man, and whether the keeper's misstatement was due to forgetfulness, or

whether it concealed some trifling breach of regulations, I made up my mind to get it explained somehow or other. It was no good going off to the Light, and asking questions point blank; the man who could stand a marine assessor's cross-examination would make short work of me. Besides, ten to one, I should be recognized, and that would be fatal. If anything worthy of concealment had happened at the time of the wreck, a visitor who had blundered into the Light that very morning—as I had done—would neither be welcomed nor supplied with further information now.

I loafed up and down a dozen wet streets in a high state of discomfort, and at last, driven by the rain, which was trickling down the back of my neck inside my collar, entered a tavern which seemed a little less unprepossessing than the others I had seen. The sign against its wall, the dim semblance of a fog-bound pussy-cat, was labelled "The White Lion," with, beneath, the legend "Skittles." Inside, a flagged passage gave entrance to a queer little three-cornered taproom, a porcelain-handled beer engine on the counter, dried horny fishes hanging from gas-brackets, and a smoky fireplace in its most acute angle. A great wicker porter's chair entirely shut the fire away from the room, and huddled in the chair was the oldest inhabitant, very snuffy and rather dirty, but with the clear bright eye of a man who has followed the sea. He bade me a quavery good morning, to which I replied suitably, and asked if I could have a pint of ale, whereupon he beat upon the oak table with his stick, and a thin-faced woman came hurrying into the bar.

"Pint o' beer, missus, please," I said. "You goin' to 'ave one 'long o' me, uncle?"

Uncle was pleased to accept my hospitality, and the thin-faced woman, having set the beer before us and

taken the money, retired and left us alone together.

We had no difficulty in finding congenial topics of conversation, and the old man never had a better listener. He started with the pilchard fishing—an easy gambit—and in ten minutes, viâ deep-sea trading—he had been a sailmaker aboard one of the old lines of Falmouth packets—we had discussed the lighting of the French coast, and were deep in admiration of our own lights.

“That there Lizard Light : we ‘adn’ no sich lights in my young days,” the old man said, his shaking withered hand outstretched in declamation. “Why, they do tell me thic light ‘ud blind ‘ee if you was witheen a quarter mile o’ ‘n. Us used to think Lewanick a gude light, an’ now they laughs at’n. My son, what’s head-keeper at Lewanick, even ‘e laughs at’n.”

It was I who beat upon the table this time. The old chap hadn’t spent such a pleasant morning for years. Never had he met one so innocently interested in all he said, from tales of the flying-fish in the tropics to the craft and mystery of smoothing down doubled seams in canvas with a sperm whale’s tooth. He talked and talked, and sipped his beer, and took snuff, and then talked again, until at half-past twelve came a rattling summons on the window pane, where a small maiden tap-tap-tapped with the rib-points of her open umbrella.

“‘Tes my gran’ddaughter.” The old man got to his feet, creaking at every joint. “Wet days ‘er cometh to caal for me wi’ th’ umbreller on ‘er way ‘ome from schule.”

“Why doesn’t she come in out of the rain ? ”

“‘Tes agin th’ law. ‘Er mustn’t enter a public : ‘er ‘s under fourteen. Gude mornin’ to you. I wish

'ee gude mornin', I'm sure. Likely I shall see 'ee 'ere again? "

"I hope so. I'm staying here a few days," I told him, and by half-past one had taken an attic bedroom, brought down my bag from the station, and was sitting in the parlour, compassed about with a multitude of antimacassars, eating cold pork, bread, and very nasty pickles.

Though I says it as shouldn't, I was an acquisition to the White Lion. Avoiding clean linen, and shaving only at infrequent intervals, I radiated affability and paid for gallons and gallons of beer. The habitués of the little tavern rejoiced like grasshoppers in sunshine. They drank my ale; they roared with laughter at my jokes; they beat me at skittles, night after night. Even the thin-faced landlady, poor soul, after a day or two of ill-concealed suspicion, resigned herself to drawing beer without stint at my expense. No enquiry as to where the money came from passed her lips, though I swear it hovered near the tip of her tongue for hours at a time. Her suspicions may have been stifled in view of the boom in trade, for my new-found friends brought their relations to make my acquaintance. "Uncle" brought his son, the Lewanick light-keeper, whom I recognized at once as the older of the two men I had spoken with in the Light. Sometimes I feared he might recognize me too: there was a shadow suggesting thought on his sunburnt brow once or twice that set me talking and laughing and telling more silly yarns at top speed. It's best to skate rapidly over thin ice: with noise and laughter and more ale, the threatened memory seemed to fade; and after two or three meetings, whenever Ted Langdon, senior light-keeper at Lewanick Cove, was ashore, he was my sworn crony. He even paid for beer for me sometimes.

I didn't dare mention the *Aspasie* or suggest visiting the Light. Seeing me there might help his memory of my face, and, needless to say, I didn't want it helped in that direction. So there was nothing to do but sit still and wait, and make the White Lion a bright and interesting home from home for all its waterside visitors.

I picked up a little information now and then. As, for instance, that Peter Bray, until recently the younger keeper at Lewanick, had been transferred to Pendeen Light, near Gurnard's Head. I noted that, for future developments, if necessary. The man who had taken his place was from the Mumbles, in the Bristol Channel, and I noted that too. And then, just as I had come to believe I was in for this life of boredom and buffoonery for the whole winter, came swift enlightenment.

Langdon brought in with him one evening a hulking, bearded fellow, well over six feet, pretty well as broad as he was high, and as self-opinionated as a borough councillor, whom he introduced with a jerk of his head, waterside fashion, as his mate. Naturally concluding that this was Bray's successor, I was affable but incurious, until some turn of the conversation led to the subject of sickness, and the mate referred to "that time when I 'ad that there apse in me face."

"Apse?" I said curiously.

The landlady interpreted. "Apses, 'e means, Mr. Vote."

"I says apse, an' I means apse," said the sufferer. "'Twas on'y one I 'ad."

"The proper pronounciation of it is apses," said the landlady.

"The proper pronounciation of it is apse," roared the moon-calf, indignant at being set right. "I've 'ad one, an' you 'avn't. Oo knows most about it?"

There was the usual beery argument, to and fro. On being appealed to, I decided in favour of apse, and asked if it was a bad one.

"Ah, I should say it was. Look 'ere." He pulled his beard aside, and showed a red and white hairless scar nearly an inch across.

"That was a bad one. How long ago?"

"Las' June."

"Not so long ago as that, surely?" I could hardly speak calmly. "It doesn't look as if it had been healed four months."

"I tell 'ee 'twas las' June. I knows the date azackly. I went ashore to see doctor the night afore that liner run on Lizard Ledge."

Langdon took a step forward as though to interrupt, his face a picture of anxiety.

"Th'—th' day a'ter, wasn't it, Billy?" he stammered.

The other turned on him angrily.

"No. 'Twasn't the day after, an' well you knows it. I knows what you'm drivin' at. Tries to make me think I was mazed wi' the pain o' th' apse an' didn't know you los' my spare suit o' clothes."

"Hey, what's that?" I said incautiously.

Langdon, with a scared glance at me, made one more attempt to interrupt, but his clumsy brute of a mate, now prompted by beer, and fairly launched on a story of his own grievances, regarded the interruption with suspicion.

"What odds if I do say I los' my spare suit? I did, an' you knaws it, for I've a told 'ee often enough. I lef' the suit in my box at the Light the night afore I come ashore, an' you let one o' they lot that landed in the cove after the wreck pinch it. An' then called me a liar on top o' that. Now you tries to stop me

sayin' I lost it. I tell 'ee what 'tis, Ted Langton; I reckon you behave queer about that suit of clothes. . . ."

For the rest of the evening my bosom friend Ted Langdon sat uneasy and disregarded in the corner by the fireplace, whilst I wrapped myself about his mate. Name, William Edgar Mitchell. Age, thirty-eight years. Occupation, lighthouse-keeper. Salient characteristics, a healed abscess in one cheek, a surly and offensive manner, and the brain of a hen in the head of a bullock.

I think I never met such an unpleasant ass in all my days, but I cooed over the brute like a woman in love. I gave him drinks—countless drinks—and for two solid hours we talked of nothing but William Edgar Mitchell and his experiences and opinions.

At the end of that time I had turned him inside out : an easy task, because there was nothing in the beast but beer and a bullying conceit. But when he went, with a surly "G'night" to me, and no word to anyone else, I had learned two things clearly by repetition—that he, second light-keeper at Lewanick, had really gone ashore the night before the wreck to see his doctor, and that he had missed a suit of uniform on his return to duty a week later. And Ted Langdon's face as he went, all sulky fear and suspicion, had told me more. I knew now for certain not only that there had been a third man in Lewanick Light, but that he had no business there. My memory could be relied on, after all. I could trust it now when it told me that the man I had seen sitting over the stove with his face tied up was a little man, no such bullock as this clown Mitchell. Mr. Peters' words came to mind, and I saw the first gleam of light since the beginning of the hunt. "His clothes was dusty and shabby, and they looked too big for him." Hadn't I noticed that the man in the

Light looked shrivelled inside his clothes? That, as much as his bandaged face, had given me the impression of illness.

For the rest of that evening I was missing from the convivial circle in the bar of the White Lion. I walked Pendennis Head under the Scotch firs, trying to fit in this new piece of information. It seemed vital: for a while I was prepared to see the other pieces of the puzzle fit around it till the whole business was clear; and it was only after an hour of walking up and down that I discovered that it didn't fit at all—that it even made the other facts I had ascertained more hopelessly incongruous than ever.

A short man, with his face tied up and in clothes too large for him, was in Lewanick Light the morning after the wreck. I hadn't noticed the pattern of his clothes, but had they been different from those of the other men in the Light it was highly probable I should have done so. Wherefore it might be assumed that he was wearing the blue serge reefer jacket and brass buttons of a lighthouse-keeper. A short man, newly shaven, in just such clothes, all too large for him, had passed forged notes in Plymouth a couple of days later. All the notes discovered on the wreck being forgeries, it was a fair assumption that this man had got his forged notes from off the vessel. If this was so, he must have been a passenger. No one but our men from the *Godwit*, and the crews of the Falmouth lifeboat and tugs had put foot on her decks at the time when I reached Lewanick Light. If he had been a passenger on the *Aspasie*—and that he must have been—then he was Bernard Schofield himself. Bearded again, and decently clad as a banker should be, he would answer fairly well to the published description I had learnt by heart months before. Of course he

was Schofield. And I knew pretty well where I could put my hand on him, for I knew whereabouts the real notes were. It all fitted together exactly. I could trace his course clearly now. He had got ashore somehow or other from the wreck, bribed the two lighthouse men to lend him Mitchell's spare suit of uniform and help him to escape, and had got away with his plunder to Brest, viâ Plymouth. He was the man I had seen in the Light. He was the man who had swindled Peters with three forged notes. . . .

And there I was, up against a brick wall again, and there the whole thing fell to pieces. Why should Schofield, flying from justice with eighty thousand pounds worth of stolen bank notes on his person, run the double risk of passing forged notes? It was unthinkable. Granted that there was a risk of the stolen notes being recognized, that risk was doubled with forged notes bearing the same numbers. If the numbers of the forged notes had been different, it would have been another matter, though the great risk of their detection as forgeries still remained. But that he should deliberately pass notes which invited his arrest on two counts instead of one was impossible.

But, whoever he was, that man in the Light was the man I had to find. He alone could unravel this tangle of mystery, and the only soul who could tell me anything about him was Langdon.

For two nights I laid in wait at the White Lion, and on the third, fearing he was staying away on purpose to avoid me, called at his house, only to learn that he had gone back to his duty at the Light. When would he be ashore again? Not for another fortnight.

By that time I'd had enough of the White Lion, and the idea of waiting there another fourteen days was too much of a good thing. To go off and call at the Light

seemed the height of imprudence, especially if his suspicions were aroused, as I believed they were. Yet there was nothing else for it. To stay idling about at that wretched little pothouse, with my man only a few miles away, was more than I could stand. I made some inquiries about the fishing at the tail of the Manacles, hired a waterman's boat and lines, and rowed off single-handed for Lewanick Cove.

My boat's bows had hardly touched the beach before Langdon came climbing down the ladder to greet me. He was affable in the extreme, sat on my gunwale, drank from a jar of beer I had brought, and discussed hooks and lines and lead sinkers at length.

Some reference being made to our last meeting, I asked where Mitchell was? Ashore, he told me, it being his week off duty.

"'An't you seen any more o' un?" he asked, stooping over the line in his hand.

"Not I."

"I thought you took to un a lot."

"I took to him as a pal of yours. Any friend of a friend is welcome," I said genially, in the approved manner of the beerhouse.

"Aw! I thought you'd took a special fancy to un."

"Only as a mate of yours."

"Aw! An' what did 'ee think o' the chap?"

I thought him jealous of my behaviour on our last meeting. His tone invited depreciation of his absent friend, and I fell into the trap at once.

"I thought him an ugly mannered moon-calf," I said incautiously.

"Aw! Well, there's some don't like un. When be you goin' off fishin'?"

"I'm only waiting for slack of ebb."

"That won't be for half an hour or more. Comin' up into th' light?"

I assented, with high hopes. Plainly he wasn't suspicious of me, and a good deal might transpire in half an hour's conversation. But I was rudely disillusioned. I thought Langdon looked maliciously pleased when we reached the gallery, and when he threw the door open for me to enter, the first object my eyes fell on was Mr. William Edgar Mitchell sprawling half-dressed upon a row of lockers.

"Hullo," I said, with a sinking heart. "I thought this was your week off duty."

"Well, you'm wrong," said that gentleman, with his customary pleasant manner. "What fool told 'ee that?"

I seized at my last chance. A row between the two men might yield something, so I jerked my thumb at Langdon, who still stood by the door, watching us both.

"He said you were ashore," I told him.

"'E's a liar, then."

"Ah! An' 'e ain't the only one," said Langdon, slowly and deliberately. "What d'ye think this ol' friend o' yours 'as just called you—thinkin' you was ashore? A ugly mannered moon-calf. That's what your dear—friend thinks o' you, Bill Mitchell."

"Wha's that," said the brute, sitting upright.

"A ugly mannered moon-calf. That's what 'e thinks o' you. 'Your mate, Bill Mitchell,' says I, thinkin' 'ow you was mighty friendly in the Lion when we was ashore last. 'My mate?' says 'e. 'No mate o' mine. I shouldn't ha' spoke a word to th' ugly mannered moon-calf if I 'adn't thought 'e was a mate o' yours'—meanin' me. A ugly mannered moon-calf. That's your mate what stands you beer. . . ."

It was a defeat, and there was nothing to do but

retire, in good order. I was outside the door before Langdon had finished, and half-way down the ladder before Mitchell's face, mouthing rage, appeared at the top of it. If he had come down the ladder, I should have had a run for the boat, but fortunately the idea didn't occur to him, and he stayed in the gallery shouting threats as to what he would do for me when he got ashore. And I was half-way home before I remembered that one chance still remained—that Peter Bray, the second light-keeper at the time of the wreck, was at Pendeen Light, scarcely twenty miles away.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT PENDEEN LIGHT

FROM the frowzy atmosphere of the White Lion, a short but none the less uncomfortable railway journey, entailing two changes of trains, landed me in heavy rain at St. Ives. Thence, in an open trap, I was driven over dreary moorlands along an unseen cliff edge, where sky and sea and landscape were blotted out by a thick Atlantic drizzle swept by half a gale of wind full in our faces. For miles and miles we plodded on, the steaming horse with his head held down, the driver and myself ineffectually trying to hide our faces in our coat-collars. Before and behind us ran a squashy lonely road, bordered with dripping heather and lost to sight a dozen yards away; above us was swirling grey, impenetrable as a blanket, and far below an invisible sea murmured and grumbled at the foot of the invisible granite cliffs. Not all the coats and rugs in the world could keep out that wet: the wind behind it drove it through and through us. Our caps were heavy sponges; our coats sopped rags, and little cold rivulets were trickling up our arms, down inside our collars, and searching out the thin places about our knees and elbows long before the trap pulled up and the driver announced that we had arrived.

"Where are we?"

"Pendeen." With a wave of his whip he indicated

the beginning of a footpath through the wet brown heather.

"But I want to go to the lighthouse."

"'Tes down there." Again he flicked his whip towards the footpath. "About a quarter mile. Can't take horse down there. 'E'd break's neck."

I scrambled out, more than ever conscious of hitherto undiscovered wet patches in my underclothing, and started almost to feel my way down over the steep path, the noises of the sea far below an all-sufficient warning against careless haste.

Stumbling and slipping over wet rocks and heather, a thought of Brest rose in my mind: of a day spent in cliff lands, when the gorse had glowed like fire in the sunshine at Kerambosquer, and of the pleasures of that happy holiday; and when I compared them with this present discomfort, and the shabby and idiotic interlude of the White Lion, I cursed the Schofield business from the bottom of my heart. Worst of all, my undignified flight from Lewanick Cove the day before rankled in my mind. Thoughts of the clown Mitchell, and of the trick Langdon had played on me, moved me to fury. I could have kicked myself as I thought how I had been trapped; but much more I wanted to kick Langdon, to hammer him about the head; in that wet, foggy solitude set about with heather and sea, I felt more like a savage of the Stone Age than a moderately civilized Englishman of the twentieth century. Armed with a flint axe, I could have hunted my erstwhile friend along the cliff edge with all the pleasure in life.

So when a cluster of whitewashed buildings heaved up through the mist, I was in no mood for suave diplomacy. One by one the dwelling-houses, stores, and engine-room emerged from the fog, all set about a

square courtyard at the foot of the light-tower. I pushed open the first door I reached, only to find a huge cellar full of coke. The trifling set-back put the final edge on my temper, and when the next door yielded and brought me face to face with the very man I was seeking, I was ready to take him by the throat and shake the truth out of him by force.

He was stooping over a great hot-air engine, oiling the immense cylinders which fed the fog-siren. On my entry he turned round, oil-can in hand, and I recognized him at once. More, he knew me, for I saw apprehension leap into his face in that moment.

"You're Peter Bray, and you were third light-keeper at Lewanick last June," I snapped at him.

"And what if I was?" he demanded.

"Just this." I pulled the key of my suit-case out of my pocket, and held it up before his eyes. "D'ye know what that is?"

No, he didn't.

"You've never seen the key of a pair of handcuffs before, then? Eh? It's no good, Bray. I've seen Langdon, and the game's up."

There was no more fight in him. All he wanted to do was to get under cover. It was all Langdon's fault—Langdon who had betrayed him (I'm afraid I went near the edge of the strict truth about Langdon), and his only anxiety now was to be first in the witness-box.

"Look here," I said. "I'll be plain with you. I've learnt a good deal from Langdon—enough to get you both into trouble—but he hasn't actually offered to turn King's evidence yet. There's nobody here now to hear what you say, and there's nothing to prevent your denying you've told me anything afterwards, if you like. But this I will say: the first

of you to make a clean breast of it stands the best chance of getting into the witness-box instead of the dock. For all I know, Langdon may at this moment be making a statement at Falmouth police station." Out came my watch. "It's now half-past twelve. If you like to tell your tale before he does, I'll see you get the credit of it. It's against the law for me to extort evidence in this way, so I'll go this far with you. What you say shan't be used against you—if you like to deny it later. And it shall be set to your credit that you spoke first if Langdon splits later on. Now, come on. What time did that chap come ashore from the wreck? "

He wavered a moment.

"Come on," I said inexorably. "I've no time to waste. This is your last chance. If you don't answer my questions, back I go at once to the police at St. Ives. What time did he come ashore? "

"Just after midnight."

"What did you do with his clothes after you'd given him Mitchell's spare suit of uniform? "

That settled it. The casual hint of complete knowledge was too much for him, and out came the whole story. All I had to do was to sit tight and listen, and take the greatest care to avoid any signs of surprise.

The greatest care was needed, too, for his first statement was a startler. The man who had swum ashore from the wreck and had changed his clothes in Lewanick Light, by his own confession, was Bernard Schofield himself!

It was impossible, of course. By all the rules of indirect evidence, it was just that—impossible. But there was one thing yet more impossible. Even in my dazed condition I could see that. It was more impossible that anyone else could be induced by any means to

impersonate him. What he was attempting—what game of bluff this was—time alone could tell. For the present I shoved all questions, including the insoluble puzzle of the forged notes, into the back of my mind, and resigned myself to listen to Bray's story.

Schofield had swum ashore, aided by a lifebuoy and drifting on the last of the flood-tide, and at high water had landed on Lewanick beach. Setting the lifebuoy afloat, to drift back on the young ebb towards the wreck, he had then climbed into the Light, and put all his chances on one spin of the wheel. If either of the men had been honest, his game would have been up. But neither was, as he was soon to learn. He gave Bray and Langdon his own name, announced that he was a defaulting banker, and offered them a hundred pounds apiece to help get him away.

Mitchell's absence made the thing all the easier : they accepted the offer, broke into his box, and gave Schofield his spare suit of uniform. But when the banker stripped to change, and they discovered that he had over four hundred pounds on his person, they put the screw on him and squeezed up their price. The exact sum in his possession was four hundred and fifteen pounds and some loose silver, and they insisted on taking two hundred pounds each instead of the hundred they had originally agreed to accept.

Schofield had no choice but to accept. They were two to one, and they had him in a cleft stick. So with only three of his notes left in a pocket of Mitchell's stolen uniform, he had sat in the Light till the afternoon, had then hailed one of the many shore boats visiting the wreck, and had been taken ashore in broad daylight, as impudent as you please.

The rest I could piece together for myself. Two days' tramp, sleeping in the fields *en route*, had brought

him to Plymouth, where he had passed off his three notes on Peters and got away to France, while the police were searching Falmouth, checking lists of survivors, and setting a watch upon the wreck.

There were still lots of questions unanswered, of course, but they could wait. The forged notes were still an unexplained mystery. Then, how had he got the real ones over to Finistère? No matter. I could find out all that later on. Meanwhile, what I had to do was to extract the last ounce of available information from this ready informer, and then fold my tent and steal quietly away. I needed nobody to tell me I was sailing very near the wind as I sat dripping in that engine-room, pretending to be a detective, and listening to information extorted by threats. It was very unlikely that Mr. Bray and myself would meet again—for my part, I should make no endeavour to renew the acquaintance—so I had to do my best to squeeze him dry on this one solitary occasion.

What had he done with the two hundred pounds he had got from Schofield? That moved him. He used shocking language. How could he change the notes, he demanded, when their numbers had been published broadcast over all the land only two days after he had got them? And worst of all, helping Schofield away had sealed his lips, and he couldn't make an attempt to claim the reward offered later for his apprehension. That gave him intense discomfort. First five and then ten thousand pounds had been dangled before his eyes, and neither he nor his accomplice Langdon had dared put out a hand to take it. That wretched two hundred pounds, locked away in his box, was damning evidence against him. He couldn't cash the notes, and he hadn't the heart to destroy them.

Once again I felt drawn by a friendly sentiment

towards Schofield. How the little scamp must have laughed in his sleeve when he left these two weak-kneed knaves behind him ! They had extorted double their price for helping him away, and not only was the money useless to them, but it had stopped their mouths and bottled up dangerous evidence against him, when plain honesty would have put thousands into their hands.

“ What did you do with his clothes ? ” I asked.

“ Burnt ’em.”

“ All the lot ? ”

“ Yes, down to ’is shirt and socks. All except ’is boots.”

“ Did he strip, then ? ”

“ Right to the buff. That’s how we come to see ’is money. ’E ’ad the notes in a belt next ’is skin, —— ’im ! ”

“ Have you cashed any of the notes ? ” I asked.

“ Not me. I dassn’t. How could I ? ” Bray demanded.

“ Where are they ? ”

“ In my box in my room across the yard.”

“ I’ll buy a couple from you,” I told him, and after many assurances that no one should know the source whence I had obtained them, we went across to his room, and he produced a brown paper parcel containing the money. They were the first notes I had seen on the English side of the Channel, and even I could see at a glance they weren’t the real thing. For some months now I had been examining Bank of England fivers far more carefully than ever before in my life, and I needed no expert assistance to tell me these were forgeries, and clumsy attempts at that. The watermark was totally different to that of a real note, the paper was thicker than it should be, and each note had cut edges all round,

instead of the single cut and three deckle edges which mark the genuine article.

But I took two of them, paying for them at their face value, and then after ten minutes of threats and warnings which nearly reduced Mr. Bray to a state of collapse, climbed the cliff path, and was driven back through the rain to St. Ives. And if the drive out had been uncomfortable, going back was in utter wretchedness.

I had learnt something new and startling, and I would have given all I had in the world to be able to forget it. Schofield was alive : so much was certain ; and where his plunder was the man wouldn't be far off. I had tracked him to Plymouth, the port for Brest, and I knew the money was in or near Brest. I could put my hand on him, restore Jem's money, and earn ten thousand pounds for myself inside a couple of days. . . .

And I daren't do it. Because I was afraid—more afraid than ever. Who had taken those notes to France ? Not Schofield—he who had stripped to the skin and been robbed in Lewanick Light. Who could have taken them, but one person ? She had been on the *Aspasie*, had been brought ashore to Falmouth, had left in a hurry without a moment's notice, and Fletcher had seen her at Brest scarcely more than a month later. But what need to call in Fletcher as evidence ? By the girl's own admission to me, she had gone there straight from Plymouth the day after the wreck. This was the result of my attempts to clear her. I had only pulled the net more closely about her feet than ever.

Just one grain of hope rose in my mind, only to be dismissed at once. Schofield was a daring scamp : could he have taken the risk of sending the notes to

France by post before his flight, or had he an accomplice who could have taken them? Not by post, for certain: though eighty thousand pounds in notes of low values might possibly have been hidden in a woman's dress, packed all together they would make a biggish parcel, and would almost inevitably have been opened by the French Customs. As for an accomplice—what sense was there in sending the notes to France when he himself was bound for the West Indies, and only the accident of the wreck had kept him this side of the Atlantic?

And he and the girl had both been aboard the *Aspasie*, outward bound. (Strange that I had never asked Marguerite Trimen where she was going, that voyage! And now I daren't ask her.) The voyage had come to a tragic end almost before it had begun, and neither she nor Schofield had got to their destination. Nor, so far as I knew, had they attempted to go there, later. She had gone back to Brest, having apparently relinquished the idea of crossing the Atlantic; and near Brest were the notes; and near the notes, I felt sure, was Schofield. Had he an accomplice? Had he? If so, who was that accomplice? . . .

And yet, in face of all the evidence, I wouldn't believe Marguerite had part or lot in the business. What had Pamela said, bless her? "She couldn't do it. She couldn't do a dirty action, that girl."

Like a man in a dream, I paid my driver at St. Ives station, collected my luggage, and found myself before the booking office hatch, repeating the words under my breath, "She couldn't do it."

"Where did you say?" asked the booking clerk.

"What? Oh, anywhere." . . . Then, at sight of his surprised face, "Paddington, I mean."

The thought of Pamela West was like a harbour in

a storm. I'd go to her, dear little clever termagant, and she'd help me, if only by comforting assurances that Marguerite couldn't do it—couldn't do it—couldn't do it.

I don't remember much of that journey. I was like a man stunned in a fight with some bullying antagonist, and the antagonist was my own reason. I wouldn't lie down to it. Again and again I said to myself: "It's impossible. Damn the evidence! She didn't do it. It's an accident—a series of accidents. By pure chance the meshes of this thing have dropped round her: they don't touch her. If one could question her, she'd step clear of the whole thing with a dozen words." A picture came to me, Marguerite blindfold and barefooted, undergoing the mediæval ordeal of the hot ploughshares. I knew if she moved, that her bare feet must step clear of the glowing iron; but in my mind she didn't move—just stood still and waited, with danger around her on every hand.

And over me stood cold Reason, a threatening bully, ready to strike at every turn and twist I made, quick to beat down every defence. When I said in my mind, "She couldn't do it," then Reason said, "Who did? How did these notes get to Finistère? Schofield didn't take them. They were on the wreck, and so was he, and so was she—and so were you, as soon as anybody. You know now he didn't take them. Did you? If not, who did?"

"She couldn't do it." I almost whined it aloud.

"Then who did? What was she doing on the *Aspasie*? Why has that journey never been mentioned between you? You've spoken of her other journeyings; why not that? And if she was on an innocent voyage, why hasn't she completed it? Why

did she leave Brest? Why, having failed to reach her destination, has she gone back there? How is it she and the notes are together in Finistère, if she didn't take them, and you didn't, and Schofield didn't?"

It's a bad time for a man when, clear-eyed, he sees his love and his powers of judgment ranged in two opposite camps. At Plymouth station the noise of the porters crying "Millbay—Millbay" took my mind off the matter for a moment. I thought of Peters, and his notes, and then, remembering I had two of the forgeries in my pocket, pulled them out and surveyed them intently—and with the act was my own man again. Metaphorically speaking, I sat up and looked about me, and Reason, my late antagonist, came beside me, friendly again, and peeped over my shoulder at those two scraps of paper.

They were ridiculous things. Reason said that, with no dissent on my part. That Bernard Schofield, astute man of affairs, and daring scamp that he was, should ruin his life and run the risk of penal servitude by absconding with a parcel of rubbish like that, was the most inconceivable thing in all the crazy puzzle. It was unthinkable—impossible—said Reason and myself, now staunch allies again.

It was impossible. That was the last word about it. What he wanted the rubbish for—what it all meant—he alone knew; but I knew as well as he could do that he hadn't come down with a crash for the privilege of getting away to South America with a lot of trashy paper that wouldn't deceive an office-boy. True, the light-keepers hadn't noticed anything wrong, but it wasn't likely many five-pound notes came their way; and, besides, they thought they were robbing him, which made his task the easier.

When a man thinks he's a smart knave, that's the safest time to trade on his being a fool. Peters was another matter. Schofield had taken a chance there : but he had told a good story, impressed the man pleasantly, and swiftly sealed the bargain and dulled his victim's wits with beer. Considering that he had but the three false notes in his pocket, and that he must get away from Plymouth as speedily as possible, I was forced to admit that some such man as Peters was his best chance, and that he had used him very adroitly. Oh, no doubt that Bernard Schofield was a man of parts. More and more I began to sympathize with him, and even to respect the scamp. He had recognized two rascals at sight in Lewanick Light-house, and used them, sealing their lips in the very act of bribing them to help him away ; whilst in Plymouth, where the first attempt to deal with a rogue would have put him in jeopardy, he had gone straight to an honest man, and used him too.

But why should so smart a man have bolted with poorly forged notes ? " He didn't," said Reason, and there we stuck together, Reason and I. He didn't. Of course he didn't. He got away with the plunder from London. What other theory was tenable ?

And if Marguerite hadn't helped him—and she didn't, didn't, didn't, I said more stoutly, refreshed by the new train of thought—if she didn't help him, who did ? If he took genuine notes from London, as he must have done, and forged ones were found on the wreck, where had the change been made ?

The train turned out beside the sea between Teignmouth and Dawlish, and in that moment I saw where that change might possibly have taken place. Down went the window, and out went my head. I was all alive and keen on the hunt.

The day had cleared, and the afternoon sun shone on a cold bright sea. As the train rounded the curve past Teignmouth breakwater, we brought in view the Parson and Clerk promontory, its red walls pierced at the base by the little black aperture of Parson's tunnel, a signal box standing by its entrance. In there Bossard had stopped the train, and there I could have sworn lay the answer I was seeking, if only I could get at it and read it. With a scream and a clatter we dashed in, were half a minute in darkness, and emerged on a vista of more red cliffs and sea. Pop, in we went again, into another tunnel, and out again, almost before one realized that the daylight had been eclipsed for a moment. In again, and out again ; and in and out again. . . .

But I noted little of the string of tunnels, for I was thinking hard. Why was I going on to Paddington ? To see Pamela West and hear her say Marguerite couldn't be a thief. Well, I knew that myself : the job before me was to prove she wasn't, so that all the world might know it too. And here or hereabouts, I felt sure, lay the key to the puzzle. Call it impulse, foolishness, what you will, I felt sure of it. Before we were clear of the last of the five tunnels, I was on my feet collecting my baggage, and when the train drew out of Dawlish station, it left me standing on the platform.

CHAPTER XIX

PARSON'S TUNNEL

IT had never occurred to me that there could be any serious difficulty in inspecting the tunnel. In my mind it had seemed a simple thing to climb a fence, get on the permanent way, and stroll through the tunnels at my leisure. One might encounter a plate-layer or the ganger on duty, but a shilling or two would go far towards inducing them to look the other way whilst I passed. In fact, the thing looked so absurdly easy that I was inclined to doubt its utility—as one does doubt the value of things too easily come by.

Standing on the platform at Dawlish, it looked easier than ever. On one side lay the town, a quaint jumble of houses, old-fashioned and new, facing each other across green lawns and a stream, and on the other side the deserted beach with bathing-machines hauled above high-water mark, and wintry gusts crisping the leaden water with dark cat's-paws racing off shore. The railway ran between the sea and town till it reached the cliffs and dived into the first tunnel. The promenade was as empty as the beach. It looked as though all I had to do was to step off the platform and walk straight along the line to my destination.

As a matter of fact, it took me five days before I could set foot on the permanent way, and then only by accident and at the risk of a broken neck. And no sooner had I got there than I was as promptly escorted off again.

Having deposited my luggage in the first hotel I came to—a deserted barrack of a place, close to the station—I took a stroll along the promenade to spy out the land, and very soon discovered it wasn't going to be as easy a business as I had thought. Just to the west of Dawlish station the line narrowed to a single track, and skirted round a promontory of the land, from which, like fingers on a hand, projected five smaller headlands. Through each ran a tunnel: the two nearest Dawlish each perhaps a quarter of a mile long, and straight as a dart. Then came two smaller ones—mere rocky arches—and between these four lay little sandy beaches, the first accessible by a path from Dawlish. Past the fourth tunnel, the cliff came sheer down to the sea, the line curving round it on a stone-built sea-wall at its feet. Once round the curve, it pierced the largest of the five headlands, a mighty mass of soft rock ending in a gigantic and grotesque red face. This face stared seaward at a detached obelisk isolated in the sea, its feet black with seaweeds and its summit white with sea-birds' droppings. The headland and its obelisk are not inaptly named the Parson and Clerk rocks, and the tunnel piercing its base—the longest of the five, and so sharply curved that from neither end can any gleam be seen of the daylight entering at the other—is known to railwaymen as Parson's tunnel. The whole headland is steep and precipitous to the water's edge, the last sandy beach stopping short to the eastward of the fourth smaller promontory, so that only a few heaps of tumbled rock, dislodged from the heights above them, and black and slippery with bladderwrack, show when the tide is low about its feet. At the Teignmouth end of the tunnel the Parson's tunnel signal-box stood sentry by day and by night, and nowhere between the signal-box and Dawlish station was

there any place where a strange foot could possibly intrude upon the line.

I spent three whole days spying out the district, and the longer I looked the more difficult it appeared. From Dawlish station to the first tunnel, the line was guarded by a six-foot spiked iron railing, and moreover was in full view of the station and the houses facing the promenade. In the little sandy coves between the first four headlands a twenty-foot wall of smooth stone, curving outwards at the top, made an insuperable obstacle. Hiring a boat, I rowed all round as far as the Parson's signal-box, only to find the wall went all the way between the tunnels, and that where it met the sea it was even higher and more inaccessible than in the coves.

On the land side things looked little better. From the valley in which lies the town of Dawlish the cliffs rise, higher and ever higher, to the Parson and Clerk promontory. The lower cliffs as far as the fourth tunnel were separated from the road by villas surrounded by walled gardens and spiked fences, and by the time these gave way to meadow-land, the railway was out of reach, a hundred and fifty feet below. Moreover, the cliffs were soft stuff, a red conglomerate, more like hard mud than rock, and the railway engineers had cut their bases back till they stood nearly as upright as the side of a house. It was almost attempting suicide even to peer over the edge of the crumbling stuff at the curving silvery metals far below.

Worst of all, the line seemed never to be deserted. Whenever I looked down from the cliffs or up from the sea, there always seemed to be some one patrolling the metals—if not platelayers or the ganger in charge of the section, some signalman going to or from his

work at the tunnel box. Whether Bossard's escapade had any bearing on Schofield's flight or no, it was certainly a funny thing that when stopping the train he should have chanced on about the most inaccessible place in all the two hundred odd miles between London and Plymouth.

In the end, it was by pure accident that I got on the line at all. Walking homewards late one afternoon across the meadows above the high cliffs, I discovered that near the last of the villas they sloped down into a little valley, along which ran a sluggish stream. Following its course until it reached the cliff, here lowered by this valley-level to no more than about sixty or seventy feet high, I found the stream had cut a steep sloping gutter in the soft rock. It was growing dusk, and had I been wise I should have waited till the next day to pursue my exploration. Instead of which I got into this precious gutter up to my armpits, stamping about with my feet to try if it would give safe foothold. I soon learnt. A stone or two gave way beneath me; a frenzied grasp at the wet rock only yielded handfuls of soft mud and grass roots; and sliding and stumbling, sometimes head first and sometimes following my feet, I rolled down the full length of the gutter, my heart in my mouth, writhing and struggling in the endeavour to stop my career before I was launched over the edge of the cliff.

Fortunately for me, the gutter had cut its way very nearly down to the railway line, and a final somersault over an easy slope of debris brought me on to the permanent way. Wet through, and smeared to the eyes with clay, I landed with a bump that shook the last breath out of my body, nearly knocking over a platelayer who was patrolling the line, a lantern in his one hand, and a long hammer in the other.

I don't know which of us was most surprised.

"'Ere, what you doin' 'ere?" he challenged me.

"Botanizing," I said savagely. As luck would have it, he took me literally.

"Oh!" said he, apparently somewhat mollified.

"But you ain't allowed 'ere, sir. This is Company's property. Trespassers will be prosecuted. You must get off the line."

"Certainly. How?"

"The nearest way."

"And which way is that?"

"Depends which way you want to go. It's pretty near the same distance to Teignmouth sea-wall or Dawlish. Where was you going?"

"Teignmouth," I told him promptly.

"I'm going that way," he said, and off we set together along the line towards the very place I wanted to see.

At the mouth of the tunnel he stopped, and motioned to me to step back from the metals.

"The five-fourteen's about due out o' Dawlish. May's well wait till she's passed. 'Tis a dirty old job meeting trains in these tunnels: there's only just room for a man to squeeze against the wall, and that makes his clothes mucky."

"'Twould take a good deal to hurt mine just now," I said with a laugh.

"So 'twould." He laughed too, good-naturedly enough. "Botanizing, did you say you was after, sir?"

I thought it best to stick to my story, but found myself in difficulties at once, for he'd forgotten far more about botany than I should ever know. I led the conversation into safer channels by asking questions about the geological formation of the cliffs above

us. He wasn't able to tell me much about them, but I found him agreeable and intelligent, and by the time the five-fourteen had passed we were on excellent terms. So far as his beat went—from Teignmouth nearly to Langstone cliff, two miles up the line from Dawlish—he knew every stone and every weed near the track, and pretty nearly every bird that flew across it. He knew where the sea-otters bred in the Parson and Clerk rocks: "There's a good many in Teignmouth and Dawlish would like to know that," said he. "And then they'd take off their dogs to 'em in a boat if they couldn't worry 'em no other way. But I don't tell 'em. Not I. Leave the poor beasts alone, I say," with which sentiment I could cordially express agreement.

The down train having passed, he lit his lantern, and I followed him into the pitchy darkness of the tunnel. There was a narrow path along by the permanent way, but here and there a sleeper projected past its fellows, and one must needs walk with care. The swinging lantern threw a distorted shadow of my conductor on the walls and roof, and what with its light dazzling my eyes, and the constant vigilance required to keep one's feet, it was with difficulty that I could spare time to look about me, as I had hoped to do. None the less, I took the precaution of counting my paces. If I saw anything worthy of future examination, I wanted to know where to find it on a future visit, and I felt pretty sure there would be difficulties about re-entering the tunnel with a light.

At a hundred-and-seventeen paces from the entrance, the swinging lantern shone on a low grated archway on the sea side of the tunnel, and I stopped and took hold of the bars of the grating.

"Half a minute," I said. "I want to rest my foot."

"What's the matter?"

"I hit my ankle in that tumble just now, and it's hurting a bit. It'll be all right in a minute or two. What's this grating for?"

"That? Oh, a crack in the rock they cut into when they built the tunnel. There's another farther on. I've heard tell they go right down to the sea."

"Ever been down either of them?"

"Me? No. Nor nobody else, as I knows on. Them gratings has been there ever since the tunnels was built."

"Then how do you know they go down to the sea?"

"I don't know it, only I've heard say they do. When the wind's in the east, there's a smell o' seaweed blows up through 'em sometimes."

Stooping forward as though to rest my foot, I put the whole weight of my body on the grating. It was immovable as the rock and brickwork around it, though I grunted with the strain I put upon the bars. "Ouch," I said, as though at a twinge in my ankle. "Come on. I can get along again now."

At the next grating—a hundred-and-twenty-two paces farther on—I halted again.

"Here's the other of those holes, I suppose?"

"That's it, sir."

The rays of his lantern shone between the bars of the grating, and I saw a narrow cavern that turned sharply to the right a few feet from the grated archway. The walls were dirty red rock shining with wet, and its floor was heaped with a debris of broken stone and glass.

"How did those bits of glass get there?"

"Sometimes passengers throw bottles from the trains—careless toads. They never thinks there might be anybody in the permanent way. If I picks up any

near by here, I throws 'em in there out o' the way. Broken glass cuts your boots about something cruel. Can't you get along a bit faster? I'm behind time now."

"I'm coming," I said, and as he turned gave another pull, unobserved, at the iron bars. It may have been fancy, but I could have sworn they moved ever so slightly. My limp seemed easier after that, and we got through the rest of the tunnel at a better pace.

Emerging at the Teignmouth end, we came immediately in front of the signal-box. Its lighted window shone right across the metals: an army searchlight couldn't have barred the entrance to the tunnel more effectually. After the darkness inside, it made me blink as though in full day, whilst my guide standing beside me pointed out the way to reach the footpath outside Teignmouth sea-wall.

"Aren't you coming yourself?" I asked.

"Not for a minute or two. I'm going up into the signal-box."

"Can't I come with you? My foot won't be any the worse for a rest before the walk to Teignmouth."

"Certainly," said he, and led the way up the steps to the lighted box.

It was the usual junction box on a small scale. A row of eight or nine levers occupied the centre of the floor, their handles bright steel, and their shafts red or green or white to correspond with coloured circles and lines upon the frame-plan hung above them. Facing the door were needle telegraph instruments with brass handles and green dials, and beside them a tall red pedestal of a thing that caught my eye at once. A cheerful fire burnt in the grate, a row of

geraniums in pots adorned the window, and in one corner a sleepy canary, roused by our entrance, cheeped drowsily in his cage.

The signalman, evidently a young porter recently promoted, sat by the fire, reading an old magazine, which he put aside as we entered. He seemed glad of visitors. Indeed, he said as much.

"'Tis a lonely old shop by night, an' there isn't hardly enough to do to keep a feller awake. No shuntin' nor anything to look after but the one set of points and signals."

Desirous to make talk and cause delay, I walked around the box, examining all its appliances, and inquiring into their uses and methods of working. Telephone as well as telegraph connected him with Dawlish on the one hand and Teignmouth on the other, and the Board of Trade safeguards against the risks entailed by the stretch of single line took a lot of demonstration. The red pedestal, he explained, was the "staff," a most cumbrous contrivance; its purpose, to lock the single line from either or both ends so soon as a train—whether up or down—had entered into the tunnels. Every now and then our talk was interrupted by the trill of a little bell or the deeper note of a tubular gong, and at each summons the signalman must busy himself with the row of levers. The gong, I learnt, announced an up train leaving Teignmouth; the bell, one down from Dawlish. Half a minute or so after each rang, the train came roaring by, and at the platelayer's bidding I crouched under the quivering window-sill till it had passed, lest any eye aboard it should see that an unauthorized person was in the box. The up trains made most noise, passing so close to the signalman's window that they shook the whole concern, and their roar and

rattle as they took the points would have rendered a gunshot inaudible.

Conversation languishing at last, I said I must be going on my road, and my platelayer volunteered to guide me as far as the public footpath. Here I wished him a good evening, walked a quarter of a mile towards Teignmouth, and then ducked down behind the parapet, sat upon the stone-flagged path, and waited till I heard his footsteps pass by on the sleepers inside the wall.

Then very cautiously I went back to the end of the sea-wall, crouched down till only half my head showed above the parapet, and kept my eyes upon the signal-box.

The night was still, and I could hear every movement in the box. The bells, the answering scrape of the signalman's chair upon the wooden floor as he rose, and even the sound of his feet as he went to the instrument to acknowledge them, were all distinctly audible. Then would come the slide and crash into place of the levers, the rattling of signal wires just under my chin, and signal lamps far down the line would change from red to green or white. Then would come the train : a roar, rattle, and blur of lights from passenger coaches, or a long heavy jolting if it were a goods. Almost before its sound had died away, I could hear the signalman at the levers again setting the signals at danger. Crash, crash, crash went the heavy levers, and one after another the green lights winked and turned again to red.

Soon I began to guess with a fair amount of accuracy what sort of train to expect. Three rings on the low-toned gong meant that a passenger train had left Teignmouth : three rings, a pause, and then another stroke with the gong, a fast goods ; two rings, a pause, and then two rings again, a heavy goods. I made up my

my mind to dodge into the tunnel behind a heavy goods. It made more noise, the noise lasted longer, and it didn't light up the surrounding district like a passenger train. So when next I heard the two pairs of strokes on the gong, I made ready. With the crash of the first lever I was on the four-foot parapet ; the second drowned the noise of my jump on to the permanent way ; and under cover of the third and fourth I ran along the metals and squatted exactly under the brightness of the signal-box window.

Too quickly to please me, for I had moved fast for a moment or two, and as yet had scarcely got my breath again ; the metals before me began to vibrate, and a headlight came round the curve half a mile away. Nearer and nearer it came until the engine seemed almost on top of me. Close over my head—standing erect, I could have caught his sleeve—shot out the fireman's arm to take the staff from the signalman, and no sooner had the engine passed than I was on my feet running and stumbling along beside the trucks. I counted them as they passed—thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—and at the sixteenth dropped flat, and rolled over on my side as near as I dared to the racing wheels. None too soon, either. There could have been no more than twenty trucks in the train at most, and the green tail-light on the brakesman's van had flashed in my face and was disappearing in the tunnel almost before I had realized that I dared roll no closer to the metals. To the sound of releasing levers in the box behind me, I scrambled to my feet and ran, sobbing for breath, into the pitchy darkness of the tunnel.

I dared not strike a light, so could see nothing, and had to feel my way, stumbling over the ends of sleepers, with only my right arm outstretched as a guide, my fingers scraping soft soot from off the tunnel wall. It

seemed an endless journey. On and on I went, with my arm stiff and tired with being held out at that awkward angle, and after the first few minutes in instant apprehension of meeting another train. Floating bright specks danced before my eyes, and it seemed hours before one of them came to rest, and I realized it was a star low in the north-east. Then all of a sudden I was in the open air, with cliffs above me high and black against a starry sky, and in that moment realized that the metals at my feet were humming and quivering with the approach of another train.

Here, however, there was plenty of room, and I sat down against the cliff to let it pass. A down train, it came racing round the bend from Dawlish, dived with a screech into the tunnel I had just left, and I rose to my feet and followed it, my mind busy with a simple addition sum. A hundred-and-seventeen and a hundred-and-twenty-two made two hundred and thirty-nine paces, and I set out, counting carefully.

At a hundred-and-seventeen paces I could feel no grating. Calculating I must have stepped short in the darkness, I stopped counting to feel my way by hand along the tunnel walls, and perhaps half a dozen yards farther on felt iron bars. I wrestled with them again, and found them immovable. By this time I thought I might risk lighting a match, and its flicker showed me I need waste no further time here. Not only were the bars stopped in with old cement, but they were rusted home. Probably my platelayer was right, and they had never been moved since the tunnel was built, some time in the early forties. So, beginning to count my paces anew, I moved on in search of the second arch. Again I was wrong, but now, feeling sure I had under-estimated the distance, went on with confidence, my left hand scraping along the surface of the wall. Ten—twenty—

thirty steps, and no grating. I stood perplexed in the blinding darkness, and then, almost as it seemed in my ear, came the screech of an up train entering the tunnel. I squatted like a partridge to let it pass, and its light showed me that I had overshot my archway, and had been feeling my way farther and farther from it every moment.

It was a small matter to find it now. In half a minute I was tugging at the bars. They yielded ever so slightly at the first pull, and, shifting my position, I could feel that their ends towards Teignmouth were loose in the cement setting. One pull with all my strength, and they slipped out as though sliding in grooves. Crouching, I squeezed between their free ends and the wall, and in less time than it takes to tell was inside the crevice, my feet sliding about on loose stones and broken bottles as I strove for foothold to pull the grating back into place again.

CHAPTER XX

THE CAVERN BENEATH THE CLIFFS

ONCE past the heap of rubbish by the grating, my feet sank with a squish into soft mud that rose above the ankles. Feeling my way, a hand on either wet rocky wall, I put one foot before the other cautiously until I felt I was round the bend in the cave, and then wiping my wet hands as best I could on my damp clothes, I struck a match—and discovered there were but half a dozen or so left in the box!

Just ahead, the cavern made another sharp turn, this time seawards—to the left. So much I saw, and no more, before the match burnt my fingers, and I dropped it on the mud, where it went out with a hiss. At the angle in the cave I must perforce light another. Whatever happened, I had to be sure of my footing. If I fell down a hole in that floor, there I should stay, for no one would ever find me. Reflecting how careful I had been to pull the grating back into place, so that it shouldn't catch the eye of any passer-by, I felt inclined to think I had overdone precaution for once.

But this second match showed a clear path, and sheltering it between my hands, I ran lurching awkwardly for perhaps another twenty yards before it went out. And then I stood in the darkness, and experienced a very nasty fit of nerves.

Dark, did I say? It was indescribable. I have no words to convey any impression of that choking black-

ness. It had been a dark evening out in the open, and it was darker under the shadow of the cliffs than anywhere else. But by contrast with the sooty blackness of the tunnels the night outside had seemed almost like day in retrospect. After first passing through Parson's tunnel, the ordinary oil lamps shining in the signal-box had dazzled me like arc lights.

And now, in this twisted crevice, buried hundreds of feet beneath the cliffs, I thought even of the tunnels with regret. At least there was a draught through them, whilst here the cold air was lifeless, still as in a sealed vault. One seemed to breathe solid blackness. If a fault in the rocky strata above me had sent their thousands of tons sliding and crushing down on me, I thought I could scarcely have had more difficulty in breathing.

I don't know how long the fit held me, but it was bad while it lasted. I was like a child in terror of the dark. I didn't know what lay ahead of me, wasn't even sure I could find my way back, and the one thought clearer in my mind than any other was that, if I met with an accident, I should never see daylight again. No one would ever find me here. According to the platelayer, no one had been down the caverns since the tunnels were built, and it was very unlikely that anyone would want to go down them again for a while. Though I was wet through, chilled to the very bone, sheer funk brought out a streaming perspiration on me, and I had to take hold of my courage with both hands to keep from scrambling back the way I came at top speed. Then I thought of Brest, and Marguerite—remembering I was here in her service collected my wits somewhat—and then, resolving to be a man and see it through, I struck another match, and before it expired had got another twenty paces or so down the

cavern to a place where it suddenly widened till its walls became invisible. Here its last flicker showed me something which made me light another match in a trembling hurry.

My platelayer was wrong. Somebody had been down here since the tunnels were built. Not so long since, either, for his footprints in the mud were still fairly well defined. I could even see, for instance, that he had been barefooted. No footprint had a heel mark, the ball of the big toe pressed more deeply into the mud than any other part of the foot, and in one or two instances even the separate marks of the toes were still discernible.

The prints pointed every way: both up and down the cavern, with others crossing them at all sorts of angles. Whoever made them had stood here for a while, occasionally shifting about from one foot to the other, perhaps to rest them or perhaps for warmth. All the footprints were full of water, and in one of them was a burnt wax vesta. Beside it on the mud was something square and white. I stooped to pick it up, but it fell to pieces as I lifted it. The portion in my hand was a drenched sop of cardboard, a blur of colours on one side of it that might once have been a picture. Dangling from it was half an inch of rotten stuff, a threadlike scrap of some tough elastic material fastened with a twist of rusty wire—and before I could make out what it was, my match went out.

Groping on the floor till I found the vesta and the rest of the cardboard, I slipped them into a waistcoat pocket for future examination. Lighting yet another match—there were now but two or three at most left in the box—I hurried down this wider portion of the cavern at top speed, my eyes on the guarded flame between my hands; and before I knew where I was had

splashed into cold water up to my knees. The match dropped as I twisted back on my tracks, flinging wide my arms to keep my balance. With the sudden jerk, I either stubbed my toe, or slid on the slippery mud, and in a moment was floundering full length in the shallow water, face downwards. It was salt—sea water. A good mouthful was enough to assure me of that, even if my hands, scrabbling for a hold under water, had not torn up seaweeds from the rocks. Spluttering and shivering, I crawled out on to the mud, more like some antediluvian beast of the slime wallowing in primæval darkness, than a human being. I was drenched from head to foot, and my last matches were useless. In despair I tried them. It was quite hopeless, of course, but still I tried, only to feel their heads crumble and drop to pieces as I rubbed them on the box. At last I gave up the attempt, threw the useless things away, and squatted on my heels at the edge of that mysterious water, wondering what on earth I should do next.

Some loose stones, embedded in the mud, touched my fingers and gave me an idea. Feeling for the level of the water, I selected two or three flat pebbles, and played ducks and drakes with them, jerking them out over the surface of the invisible pool. As far as I could hear not one got away. If they didn't sink at once, they skimmed the surface and fetched up with a smack against solid rock. Again and again I tried, growing more adroit with practice, and at every throw grew more certain. I had come to a dead stop: the water filled the cavern to the roof. As my platelayer had said, the cavern reached the sea, but it came out underwater. Only a diver or an otter could get through it to open air.

Only then did I realize that I was dead beat. Utter

weariness came over me : it was groaning labour even to stand upright ; and I stumbled back through the sloping cavern like a somnambulist. I'd had a day in the open air, ending with a tumble that had given me a good shaking, and only narrowly missed fitting me for hospital. On top of that, dodging the signalman had meant violent and unaccustomed exertion. Later my nerves had served me a nasty trick ; and now, with the last ounce of energy out of me, I could have lain down in the mud and cried myself to sleep in the dark like a child. My mind was as tired as my body : I felt numbed, incapable of reasoning or conjecture, and it must have been by instinct alone that I found my way to the grating, fumbling along with no more remembrance of the road I had come than has a migrating bird returning to its nest of the year before. I have a notion that I felt a stupid sensation, something like gratitude, when my hands touched the iron bars of the grating, but I groaned aloud at the labour of pushing it open. After that, half a dozen snapshot memories come to mind : the first sight of stars, and of the lights of Dawlish, low across the sea ; of myself hesitating before dropping off the sea-wall on to the beach in the cove nearest to the town ; myself again in the hall of the hotel, reeling with fatigue and explaining to two scared-looking women—probably the manageress and book-keeper—that I had “ had an accident and fallen over the cliffs ”—and then I remember no more till I was waked late next morning by the gentle beat and trickle of winter rain against my window.

The sight of the pillow and of my hands sent me to the looking-glass, and I didn't know my own face. No wonder the manageress had looked so frightened the night before ; and after another glance at my pillow and the bedding, I thought it likely that she'd got another

shock coming. As for myself, even now, after a night's sleep had transferred most of the filth to the bed-linen, I was unrecognizable. My hair was caked together, my ears half full, every line in my face was outlined black, and wherever my skin was visible on neck or arms it was blotched or smeared thickly with tunnel soot mixed with the red clay of the cliffs. As for my clothes and boots, they were done for. A tramp would have turned up his nose at the best of them.

Slowly, little by little, the events of the previous evening came to mind, at first accompanied by a dull feeling of disappointment at achieving nothing. But as I gradually awoke—came to life again would be a better way of putting it—some interest revived in me. After all, I had learnt something that no one else knew. The platelayer, who probably knew more about the tunnels than anyone, had said nobody had ever been in the cavern, and he was wrong. Some one had been there, and recently, too. The footprints I had seen proved that. With my mind upon those footprints, I remembered the wet scrap of cardboard I had found amongst them, and, searching in my damp waistcoat pocket brought it to light, together with the burnt wax vesta I had found beside it.

Twiddling this last between my finger tips woke some vague memory. Where had I seen thin wax matches like that before? I blinked and puzzled over it for a while, and then, putting it aside, concentrated my attention on the crumpled wad of cardboard.

By now it was a mere formless lump. Soaked to pulp when I found it, its sojourn in my waistcoat pocket had squeezed the last vestige of shape out of it. From it still dangled the thread-like thing I had noticed when I picked it up, the daylight at once revealing it as a thin strip of rotten rubber. The least pluck between

finger and thumb was enough to tear it away from the tiny twist of wire which had attached it to the card.

There still remained traces of some colour in a fissure of the crumpled mass, and I picked at it gently with a finger-nail and the point of my penknife. Under persuasion the card unfolded and displayed to my astonished eyes the upper half of a portrait printed in crude colours—a portrait of a mild, chubby gentleman in spectacles. Across it had been gummed a slip of grey paper, still in place and still with some traces of lettering on it. “RES DE L’ET” was as much as I could make out, and with that came revelation, and I could fill in the blanks. “Manufactures de l’Etat.” There was the inscription completed. The portrait was of President Thiers; the cardboard had been a match-box—the sliding pattern that flips shut after use—and vesta and box were from a French factory, made under the State monopoly and bearing the official Government stamp. The barefooted man who had been before me in the cavern had lighted his path with French-made matches; a French sailor had stopped the train in the tunnel; and the notes were now in France. At last, after months of searching, I had three facts that fitted loosely together.

But how had he got out of the cavern, with its seaward exit under water? Pondering, I looked out of the window on to the beach, and that question was answered too. For the tide was nearly at quarter ebb, and even as I watched it I heard a church clock strike eleven. That meant high tide at about nine, and it would be twenty minutes earlier the night before. When I had been in the cavern it had been close on high water. No wonder the entrance to the cavern was closed.

After a bath and breakfast, I apologised to the manageress for the state of my room, and sought the beach. Low water was at two-thirty or thereabouts, and, the rain having cleared off, I hired a boat and put to sea. The breeze was offshore; it was child's-play to land upon the rocks at the foot of the Parson; and by half-past one I had entered the cavern, climbed to the spot where the tide had baffled me, and discovered not only my own footmarks and the useless matchbox I had thrown away the night before, but more and more prints of the bare feet, plainly to be seen pointing both up and down the cavern.

What more could any reasonable man ask? Assuming that the parcel of genuine notes was dropped in the tunnel when Bossard stopped the train, a steam-launch—or a yacht, for expense couldn't have mattered much with eighty thousand pounds in question—a yacht cruising outside Dawlish could easily send a boat ashore under the Parson and Clerk, and there was the whole story told.

My path lay clear ahead of me now. All I had to do was to get across to Finistère, find Schofield—not a difficult matter in that thinly populated district, surely—pick up ten thousand pounds reward; and then for Marguerite. This business once off my hands, I meant using every power I could bring to bear on her to make her marry me. She liked me, I knew, and she should have no rest till she said Yes.

But, as is usual when one has all one wants, Fate decided to give me full measure. For nearly half a year—ever since I had gone aboard the *Godwit* in search of holiday, and found myself plunged in tragedy instead—this business had plagued me night and day. From the Lizard to Lundy Island, from London to Brest and back, from Brest to Plymouth, Falmouth,

Dawlish : I had been driven from port to port, lived in taverns, invaded lighthouses, fallen down a cliff, sneaked into railway tunnels by night, forgathered with men of all sorts, good and bad—light-keepers, wharfingers, railway men, policemen—worrying at the business for months on end like a dog at a bone. Out of all the varied information I had gained at last I had my reward—three little facts that fitted together—and now without further seeking was to learn how and when that barefooted man had left the cavern.

When I got back to Dawlish, inquiry at the hotel revealed the fact that I could not leave for Brest till next day. The summer service from Plymouth had been discontinued, and there were now only two crossings a week. The next was on the morrow, and I decided to stay at Dawlish for the night. To kill time before the evening meal, I strolled to the end of the Dawlish sea-wall as far as Langstone Cliff. Here, as between Teignmouth and Dawlish, the railway pierces a headland, but the cliffs being low it passes through a cutting instead of a tunnel, the end of the promontory, isolated by the cutting, standing up like a square island of rock to seaward of the line. A flight of steps led to its summit, and I climbed them, intending to have a look along the coast, but just as I reached the top it came on to rain again. Close to me were a flag-post and a little wooden look-out hut, and outside the hut a coastguard was waving two flags, talking semaphore language to the coastguard station at Exmouth, about two miles away.

"Can I take shelter in your hut?" I asked him, when he dropped the flags to his side.

"Yes," said he briefly.

His chin stuck out, and he was peering out at Ex-

mouth through the rain, reading the reply to his message, much too busy to look at me. The hut was furnished with a rough wooden seat, a flag-locker, lamps, and other signalling apparatus, and whilst I was examining them the coastguard entered shaking the rain from his wide collar.

"I hope I didn't put you out just now."

"That's all right," said he. "You'll excoose me answerin' you short, but Exmouth was talkin'."

"So I saw." I proffered tobacco, and made room for him on the seat beside me, and we sat talking for a while in a desultory sort of way. He knew several ports I had visited, and by degrees we drifted round to a discussion of the relative advantages of the coast-guard service and life in the fleet.

"When a man's afloat he wants to come ashore," said he, like an oracle. "An' when he's ashore, 'alf the time he wishes he was afloat again."

"That's human," I said.

He misunderstood me. "Woomen, did you say?"

"No. Human."

"Oh. . . 'Tis the woomen too. A married man afloat, 'e thinks a job in the coastguard with a 'ouse of 'is own would be a fine thing. An' then 'e puts in 'is name to come ashore, an' finds 'is 'ouse ain't 'is own, after that."

"No?"

"No. Woomen can't understand dis-cip-line. Regulations says the chief officer in charge of a station must have access at all reasonable hours to every part of the station. Then when 'e's inspectin' married quarters, if 'e sees a spot o' grease on the kitchen table, does 'e tell a man's wife of it? Not 'e. 'E ain't got the pluck to do it. 'E tells 'er 'usband, an' orders 'im—'er 'usband, mark you—to tell 'er to scrub 'er kitchen

table oftener. . . That's a dam fine sort of a way o' doin' things, ain't it ? ” He snorted with indignation.

“ You consider the officer in charge ought to instruct a man's wife in housekeeping ? ”

“ We-ell.” He mused. “ Maybe that wouldn't do, neither. I reckon her 'usband would 'ear about it all the same. She'd want 'im to go an' punch 'is superior officer on the nose for interferin' in 'er affairs—or else p'r'aps she'd tell 'im off 'erself; an' what sort of a Bank 'Oliday turn-out would a coastguard station be like if that sort o' thing was allowed ? No. Woomen don't understand dis-cip-line.”

Seeing him perturbed, I tried to change the subject by asking questions about his duties as lookout, but found him little better pleased with them than with the narrow things of home.

“ Fishermen. They're our trouble,” said he morosely. “ Three-mile limit : that's the rule. If they comes trawlin' within three miles of the shore we're supposed to put off and arrest 'em. Arrest ? ” He spat through the doorway of the hut. “ How're we to arrest 'em ? In a breeze they just laughs at us. Them Brixham trawlers could sail round an' round our boats. An' they're wicked swabs, too. One of 'em tried to run us down when we put off after 'em one dirty day last year, an' we 'ad all we could do to get away. The skipper an' mate got six months apiece for it, though,” he added, with gloomy satisfaction.

“ Is there much trawling done hereabouts ? ”

“ A fair amount. Mostly it's trawlers we 'as to deal with. English boats, that is. There's French drifters puts into Torbay sometimes.”

“ How do they behave ? ”

“ Oh, pretty good. They don't mean to do no 'arm—not like them Brixham thieves—but they're a stoopid

lot, Frenchies. Always runnin' into places where they ain't got no business to go, an' then we got to put off an' help 'em out o' trouble, an' that's all so much bother as chasin' Brixham men outside the three-mile limit. They don't seem to know what they're doin', 'alf the time, them French fishermen. Why, dam me if one of 'em didn' very near get piled up last summer on the Parson an' Clerk over there in broad daylight, an' fine weather at that."

"How did he manage that?"

"I dunno. All I know is we see 'er close in under the cliffs one afternoon, an' she seemed like she was aground—couldn't get away. It was a dead flat calm, an' we rowed off to 'em, an' when we got alongside you never see such doin's. They was in a proper panic, thinkin' they was goin' to be wrecked. They'd got their boat overside an' one chap 'ad acshally got ashore some'ow, in 'is shirt an' trousers, with 'is traps in a oilskin bag. When we got up to 'em there 'e was flounderin' about among the rocks under the Parson."

"What did you do?"

"Took 'im off in our boat an' put 'im aboard. Then we towed 'em off about a couple 'undred yards an' told 'em to go 'ome to France. They was that pleased, anybody 'd think we'd saved their lives."

"How long ago was this?" I asked him. But I knew pretty well what the answer would be.

"Las' June. I knows the day exactly. 'Twas the afternoon of the same day when that there Belgian liner run on the Lizard Ledge in the evenin'. Do ye remember that? *Ash—Ashpasher*, she was called, or some such name. There was a lot drowned—emigrants, mostly. Over a 'undred of 'em. You may recall the wreck by that."

"Now you remind me, I believe I do remember some-

thing about it," I told him, and, the rain having ceased, bade him farewell and walked back to Dawlish, musing all the way on the tricks of a Fate which always waits to be sure one has all one wants before proceeding to shower gifts in profusion.

CHAPTER XXI

FEAR AND DOUBT

IT was a roughish crossing to Brest. The strong south-wester that had blown steadily for the past week, sweeping the rain-veils landwards from off the face of the Atlantic, had marshalled behind them fifty-mile ranks of good honest seas, swinging up Channel like well-drilled mighty battalions. Now, for spite, it had veered to the south-east, and was tearing in squalls across their rolling line of march, shattering their formations and knocking them into a pretty steep criss-cross Channel chop.

The steamer made very bad weather of it, behaving like a wet little hooker. However, she got through or over it somehow, wobbling sideways across the crest of big seas, and butting full tilt at the smaller ones, much to the discomfort of everyone on deck. Not that there were many folks there to suffer from the weather. Except for members of the crew, I never saw a soul aboard all the way from Plymouth Breakwater to the Rade de Brest.

But, warm under the lee of the fiddleys, I could laugh at it. Presumably I must have looked cheerful, for the donkeyman, popping his smutty face out through the fiddley door for a breath of fresh air, looked at me with some curiosity in his eye.

"Good day," I said. "A fine afternoon."

"Is it?" said he politely. "An' may I ask what you would call a dirty afternoon?"

"Well, 't isn't raining," I pointed out, holding on with both hands.

"Is it not? Really?" said he. The steamer at that moment taking one of the smaller seas end on justified his elaborate sarcasm. I saw it coming, and dodged under the deck shelter, but a cascade from off the roof above him soused him to the waist. "No, as you observe," said he, "it is not raining. This water is salt, an' is therefore not rain. You ought to be a meterologist, you did. I presoom you regard this as a pleasure trip."

"I do," said I.

"Well," said he, "there's a old sayin' which you may 'ave 'eard, that 'e 'oo goes to sea for pleasure would go to 'ell for pastime. You won't get 'arf drowned there, anyway, if the Good Book's true. I wish you good arternoon. The band plays on deck at four P.M. precisely."

I laughed at his joke, and so established an amicable understanding.

"Never mind about the band," I told him. "You go downstairs, and make those wheels go round faster. I don't want to be out in this all night."

"Thought you liked it," said he.

"So I do, in reason. But I like a change occasionally, too."

"You seems a cheerful cove, guv'nor," said he. "Would you like to come below, for your change? I don't promise anything elaborate. There's no red carpets on the staircase, but p'r'aps you'll overlook that. Come an' spread a little ray o' sunshine in the stoke'old, Mr. Sunny Jim. We can do with it," he added, with meaning.

It was probably drier below, so I accepted his invitation, and made the acquaintance of two firemen and

the sorely tried second engineer. "She ain't used to steam," he informed me with savage irony. "She ain't really a ship, if it comes to that. She's a sort of marine goods-waggon. She was built to be pulled by a horse up and down sidings in Millbay yard, and all this water flusters her. Then the skipper, being on the bridge and seeing masts and rigging and a compass, he falls into the error of thinking she really is a ship, and tries to make her behave thereafter; whereas what she really wants is two pair of wheeled bogies, and a shunting engine, or an old horse to pull her about."

There were excuses for his temper. With all the skylights closed the engine-room was stifling, and he durst not leave the throttle, for the engines were racing half the time. But I laughed at his way of putting it, and that cheered him a little, and a bottle of beer smuggled down from the bar restored him to good humour.

Nothing could upset my temper. Whether in the close and stinking engine-room, or in the empty chilly saloon, or on the drenched decks, I could have laughed aloud in the delight of achievement and for sheer joy in being alive. It was right and proper that the weather should be foul: to have gone to Marguerite across calm seas would have been too easy a thing. This—the soar and plunge in the teeth of the southeaster, its shrill song in the funnel-guys, the low beaten smoke tearing away to leeward, the drenched and straining hull, the driven men—these made a fitting journey towards such a goal. The barefoot pilgrimage confers the greatest merit: what right-minded man would choose to use luxurious travel to approach the shrine he would invoke? So the more it blew, and the more we flung about like a cork in a mill-race, the

higher grew my hopes. The grubbing and ferreting was over. I had found and now could keep the scent, and the quarry was near, soon to be overtaken. Every wave that crashed aboard, to run overside in marbled foam, every revolution of the whirling engines, brought me so much nearer to Schofield, to the ten thousand pounds reward, and to my journey's end.

And then—

“Trip no farther, pretty sweeting,
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.”

The metre fitted itself to the rhythm of the engines below, and the engines sang back to me, over and over again: “Trip-no, fur-ther, pret-ty, sweet-ing, Journeys, end-in, lov-ers, meet-ing.”

And at last we got under the lee of the land, into the comparative calm of the Channel de Four, and turned into the smooth water of the Rade, so landlocked that the wind could but dull its surface with crisp cat's-paws, and so to the Port Maritime of Brest in a heavy shower of cold rain. I had wired Marguerite from Plymouth. And there she was, waiting for me, beneath the galvanized roof of a dock-shed; and once my eyes fell on her slender figure, the noise and grime and squalor around her might have been a peaceful garden for all I saw or heard of it.

The donkeyman stuck out a head as I passed along the deck. He had shared some of the engineer's beer, and was affable.

“Still fine weather?” said he, with a grin.

“Never finer,” I answered.

“But surely”—he cocked an eye upwards through the downpour—“surely this is rain, if I ain't mistaken?”

"What of that?" I demanded. "You don't feel the wind so much in here. Some of you fellows are never pleased."

"Some of you others are, pretty easy," said he. "Good-bye, Mr. Sunny Jim. I 'ope you'll never come across no really bad weather, an' if you do I 'ope I shan't be there. So long."

I suppose he disappeared down his iron ladder, but I didn't wait to see. For we were alongside, the gangway was outboard, and I was on the quayside holding her by both hands, watching the quick colour flowing up under her soft skin. And when her grey eyes were looking straight in mine, I saw glad welcome in them. In that moment I knew her trouble, whatever it had been, had lifted of its own accord. Gone was the last faint shadow of apprehension: her smile was more than a mere greeting. There was laughter behind it: she was merry, as a healthy girl should be. Quite apart from anything I had been doing, it was evident some weight had gone from off her shoulders.

"This is good. This is good of you, to come and meet me, Marguerite. You're a sight for sore eyes. Mine are sore, too. Salt. We've had a deuce of a crossing."

"Was it very bad?"

"I wish it had been fifty times worse. Then I could feel I deserved that you should come and meet me."

"What nonsense. Of course I should come, Mr. Voogdt. One doesn't meet old friends every day."

"Are you glad to see me?"

"Very glad."

"Very glad, indeed?"

"Very glad, indeed." She laughed outright, a little rising gurgle of fun that was a new delight to

me, who thought I knew her through and through. "How much longer are you going to hold my hands?"

"Always."

"Don't be silly," said she reprovingly. "Now, let me go at once, and go and see about your baggage. Where are you staying?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. I haven't thought about it. I'm back in Brest, and you've come to meet me. That's enough for my poor mind to grasp at one time. Can't I come and stay near you in the rue St. Mathieu?"

"I suppose you can, if you really wish it. But for the present you'd better go to a hotel. Here's the porter from the Continental, where you stayed before. Will you go there?"

"Anywhere you like," I told her. "Pst! Here! you. Take my things up to the hotel, will you? Two bags and a cabin trunk, all marked A. V. . . . There! That's done. Now you, Marguerite. What have you been doing since I saw you?"

Talking, we walked up the ramps together, and I forgot it was raining till she told me to fasten the neck of my waterproof—with a little proprietorial tone delightful to hear.

"You'll be drenched," she said. "Anyone would think it were a fine day, to see the way you're going about."

"So it is a fine day. The finest day for years."

"It's raining in torrents."

"My lord, it is the blessed sun," I quoted.

She knew the words. "From *The Taming of the Shrew*," said she, with a little grimace. "That's ominous."

My heart jumped in me at what her words implied.

Did she—could she mean that she had changed her mind already ?

“ Don’t be scared,” I said. “ I’m the shrew, and the taming’s in your hands, if you’ll take it on. Will you ? ”

“ We’ll see. Here’s a request to begin with. Try and walk with your eyes in front of you instead of staring at me with your head twisted over your left shoulder. You’ll find it easier.”

“ I shall find it the hardest task of my life,” I said. “ Oh, Marguerite, it is good to see you again.”

We lunched together at the little café of her choice ; dined together at the Continental—M. and Madame Auffret playing propriety and practising English ; and when we parted had arranged an excursion together two days later, much to the dismay of the Auffrets, who protested loudly. It was winter ; the weather was inclement : and, finally, when they went home they were murmuring to each other that it was all true what people said—that the English were stark mad.

Much I cared. Winter ? It was summer time for me. What mattered the weather, wet or shine, warm or cold, so that Marguerite smiled ?

When she was at the door : “ Shall I see you to-morrow ? ” she asked.

“ Not before the evening. I hope to call then, if Madame Auffret will allow me.”

Madame would be delighted, and said so over and over again, in both French and English, so as to remove any possible doubt about it. Nodding and bowing, and replying with suitable compliments to her voluble chatter, I felt all the time that Marguerite’s eyes were upon me. Meeting them in the act of farewell, I saw a puzzled shadow in their depths, and could have sworn the question was near her lips, “ What was I

doing in the daytime? I thought—or rather hoped—there was even the faintest trace of pique in her manner, as though I had no right to come to Brest except on her account.

Nor had I. Wasn't it on her business I was bent next day? Had she asked, I think I might even have told her so. But all she said was, "Good night. Thanks. Good night," and the hotel entrance became an empty desert the moment she was out of sight.

The early train for Morlaix left at half-past-seven next morning. I was at the station by a quarter-past, and who should I meet amongst the group of people waiting in the *salle d'attente*, but the Jewish-looking detective who had stayed at the Continental last August? As he made no sign of recognition, I didn't either; but I got into the same compartment of the train with him, and, when the two other passengers got out at Landerneau, nodded, and asked him how he did.

"Still here, then," I said. "How's the search progressing?"

"Slowly. Slow but sure, Mr. — I forget your name."

"Voogdt," I prompted him.

"Mr. Voogdt. Thank you, sir. Slow but sure, as I was saying."

"Can you put your hand on——" I nearly said Schofield, but bit the word off just in time. "Have you put your hand on any more of the notes?"

"Oh yes. They're coming to light here and there, Mr. Voogdt."

"Where, may I ask?"

"Why, various places. They're scattered somewhat."

"Any more in Brest, or this district?"

"A few. Last August. Since then—But no doubt you've heard from London?"

"I've heard nothing since I saw you last."

"Well, it's rather puzzling," said he slowly. "As you'll remember, the first notes were found here—a goodish number of them. Then all of a sudden we stopped finding 'em. Not one single note's come to hand in or near Brest for the last two months."

"I thought you said they were turning up here and there?"

"So they are. Not here, though. Seven or eight have been sent to London by banks in Paris, and a few in the provinces. Tours, Dijon, Bordeaux—even one at Marseilles."

"What do you experts make of that?"

"Well, it looks rather as though whoever stole the notes has got away out of France. It's a very puzzling case. The plain truth is, we're beat," said he, with a sudden burst of confidence. "The thief, whoever he was, seems to have had warning, and so stopped putting the notes into circulation, and got clear away. Even if he's gone abroad, he's just as careful, whoever he is. All the foreign and colonial banks and all the steamer companies have had special reminders about the case, with lists of the numbers stolen, but not one single note has been found except those few scattered ones I've mentioned. I'm expecting to be recalled to London almost any day now. They can't keep me eating my head off here for ever, can they? It's the most extraordinary case ever came my way."

"What do you make of it, in your own mind?"

"Very little, sir. It's a puzzle, all of it. Y'see, there's no doubt Schofield was a very shrewd man—the sort of man that would plan a thing like this properly, and leave no traces behind him. Those forged notes

point to some very deep scheme. Then just as he's got clear of England comes this wreck. He's drowned, and all his plans are cut off short in the middle, and now who's to say what he was driving at ? ”

“ Haven't you got a notion at all ? ”

“ Well, here's a theory for you. It's my own, mind you, and p'r'aps it's all wrong ; but put it for the sake of argument that he'd got away on that liner with an accomplice. Put it that they were to part at the first port in the West Indies, where his accomplice was to leave the ship with his half of the plunder. Put it that Schofield meant at the last moment to hand him the packet of duds with a few good notes on top, and go on to South America, get rid of the genuine ones, and disappear. The wreck upsets all that. Schofield is drowned. His accomplice grabs the first parcel of notes he sees, and somehow or other—by sheer luck, perhaps—gets the genuine ones. He crosses over here from Plymouth, plants all he can at Brest, and when he smells danger clears out abroad with the rest of the notes in his possession. I don't say it happened so, but it isn't impossible, is it ? . . . Here's Morlaix. You getting out here ? . . . Well, good morning, Mr. Voogdt. Glad to have met you again. Staying at Brest, are you ? Oh yes.” He smirked, and I said good morning, and abruptly left him.

So no more notes had come to light in the district. The idea was unpleasant. For one thing, I shouldn't find Schofield as easily as I expected ; and for another, —I wouldn't think of it or try to reason out what it meant. But after a long day spent between Morlaix and St. Pol de Leon, I took the evening train back to Brest in a black state of depression. I'd found no notes myself, of course. Indeed, I'd only set about

changing the money I had brought in a half-hearted way, and more for the sake of keeping my mind from brooding on a notion the detective's words had suggested, than with any hope of finding the wretched things. Besides, what was the use of trying now, with every bank in France on the *qui vive*?

The detective's absurd theory weighed heavily upon me, too. I knew most of it was wrong, of course. Not only did I know that Schofield had escaped from the wreck, and got as far as Plymouth, but I knew also that his accomplice had never seen the *Aspasie*, unless the liner had chanced to pass his fishing-boat on her way down Channel to Plymouth. But his assumption that Schofield had left France seemed likely enough, and my mind insisted on coupling Marguerite's new gaiety with the fact that the trail was lost. I had followed Schofield's doings step by step for months—traced him to Plymouth, learnt almost for certain that his plunder had been sent to France from Parson's tunnel by a fishing-boat—and having learnt that much one would have thought had cleared one's mind about Marguerite. Yet now, instead of feeling confident and happy, as I had felt the day before, I found myself worried and depressed beyond measure. She had been on the *Aspasie*; she had been frightened and apprehensive when the notes were circulating freely; and now they had disappeared and Schofield had disappeared, happiness made another woman of her.

For a man whose boast it is that he has kept clear-headed and judicial, and divorced himself from strong emotions for years, there is something humiliating in finding himself even willingly under the strong influence of another. Clear-headed and practical, did I say? Why, I was as flighty as a nervous woman,

and as touchy as a rustic now where my girl was concerned. The thought of her warped my reason. Although, when things had looked black against her, I could say with Pamela West, "She didn't do it. She couldn't do it," now that I thought I had convinced myself of her innocence, I couldn't disabuse my mind of the idea that she had some knowledge of the affair. And I daren't ask her. One moment I felt sure her first words would prove her innocent as a child, and the next I was wavering—afraid, literally afraid, to ask. I tried to persuade myself I feared to ask her because the question might anger her, sweet and good though she was—but I couldn't disguise from myself the fact that I feared to ask her for quite another reason. Suppose she faltered—showed fear instead of indignation?—what should I do then?

At every thought of her my spirits rose and fell unsteadily between happy confidence in her and a dull fear of her entanglement. I never imagined—no, not in my blackest hour—that she was a willing accomplice, or that she had profited by the theft. But even Pamela had said she thought that perhaps the business had touched her life in some way, and now I felt sure of it. And she was the only one who could tell me the truth, and I dared not ask her. That is what it came to: the knowledge I wanted lay behind her lips, and I dared not try to open them to speak in her own defence.

In due course we ran into Brest station, and I went to the hotel, changed, and after dinner called at the Auffrets, to arrange about our excursion on the following day. Marguerite was alone, and the first question she asked was, "Where had I been all day?"

"Morlaix," I told her.

"Yes?" Her tone invited further confidences, but

I had none to give. For the moment I thought of saying I had friends there, or some business to do, but found I couldn't lie to her, and so said nothing. My silence built a little barrier between us, or put us out of accord with one another, and from that moment the evening was a flat failure. I had come back to Brest with high hopes. I was going to carry everything before me; and now at our first *tête-à-tête* could only sit glum, staring at the fire, and answering her attempts at conversation in monosyllables.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked at last.

"N-no. Liver's out of order, I expect. I'm not an amusing companion, I'm afraid. . . . What about to-morrow?"

"Madame Auffret says she can't come," she replied.

"I'm sorry," I said: the usual perfunctory polite lie. "However, that needn't interfere with us."

"It stops my going," said she, rather stiffly, I thought.

"What nonsense! Of course you'll come."

I must have spoken too assertively, for she got cool at once. "I think not."

"What am I to do with myself all day, if you don't?" I demanded—making matters far worse, of course.

"Go to Morlaix again," said she promptly. Evidently my lady was only human, after all. This newly recovered Marguerite, that could laugh and be happy, could also show annoyance. But the queen can do no wrong; I only thought the more of her for the little hint that she had a temper. After all, marble statues are cold things, and goddesses very high and far; poor humanity wants a woman who can quarrel as well as kiss. To be always on one's knees is cramping;

things become easier, more homelike, when the goddess steps down from her high place, and becomes a woman.

I ought to have realized as much at the time. Her touch of pique should have encouraged me ; but I was tired and depressed, and, instead of laughing it off, went on stupidly plaguing her to come next day, regardless of Madame Auffret's absence.

But she wouldn't. The more I pleaded and begged her "not to be silly"—for so I put it, plunging deeper and deeper into trouble—the more she resisted. In the end we almost quarrelled—which I should have called a most encouraging symptom had anyone else been in my place. Not being in the position of looker-on, I found it less exhilarating than I could have wished.

Worst of all, some malicious little devil in the back of my brain kept on whispering : "She won't go because she's afraid to give you the chance of sounding her. She's afraid of you when no one else is by. She's afraid of betraying some knowledge of the Schofield business."

When I rose to go, I asked her outright : "Why won't you come to-morrow ?"

"Because Madame Auffret can't come, and I must have a chaperon," she answered stubbornly.

If inability to tell a lie plausibly is a guarantee of innate truth, then I had that guarantee, for never was a falsehood told more lamely. She didn't even look as though she expected me to believe it. Her air said, "I don't want to go with you, and I won't. But politeness demands some sort of an excuse, and Madame Auffret's absence is the one I choose. Take it or leave it."

All I could do was to say I was sorry, and leave her

with not so much as a word relating to a future meeting. I went home raging, sullen, depressed, and above all in a lively state of anxiety about her. And that was the first instalment of my reward for nearly six months' labour in the effort to clear her name.

CHAPTER XXII

SUSPICION—AND LOVE

FROM that first unlucky evening everything went wrong. Not that our near approach to a quarrel had any lasting results—indeed, I can safely say it had none, for we met on the best of terms again at once ; but after that reconciliation the more we saw of each other the further we seemed to recede from mutual understanding. It was not that my doubt of her—a doubt which was at the bottom of all the trouble—was a plant of steady malignant growth : there were meetings when all was pleasant between us, hours when I felt that at last we were on the road to recovery of our old happy confidence in each other ; but such intervals slowly became fewer and further between, and the little happiness they gave us came soon to be clouded by mistrust.

No blame attached to Marguerite. It was my fault throughout ; never hers. Take a man unaccustomed to pay court to women, and plunge him head over ears into a love affair—even in commonplace circumstances the most exciting and perturbing business in the world. Multiply his emotions a hundredfold by reason of their unfamiliarity ; all his delights and doubts and fears and little triumphs, his moments of serene confidence and his dire despairs about trifles that need matter not at all. See to it that he is a confirmed bachelor by temperament—for in that I will confess Jem West for once was right—a man wedded to freedom ; and set

him to the wooing of a woman to the full as independent as himself: both of them entirely unfamiliar with, and hitherto rather inclined only to be disdainfully tolerant of, this business now in hand. Add suspicion: tangle and twist and smear over all their relations with the suspicion of a very dirty piece of theft. And before long—I speak from fell experience—you shall have a very discontented man, all his preconceived ideas as to a love affair well out of joint, and himself as nervously awkward as any bumpkin, abject and stiffnecked by turns, and each time wrong. As for the woman's side of the business—well, an angel would need to readjust its plumage now and then after association with such an awkward booby.

It was suspicion that lay at the bottom of the trouble. By now I was so soaked and permeated with that filthy Schofield affair that I couldn't keep it out of my mind. From the very start I coupled the gladness of Marguerite's first greeting with the idea that Schofield had got away, and after that things went from bad to worse. If she was kind I suspected her of some ulterior motive. Perhaps she was trying to discover how much I knew. Perhaps to cajole me into giving up the search? If, repelled by silence or awkwardness on my part, she became stiffly polite, then I would have it that she feared me—knew of my suspicions, and became reserved for fear of letting drop anything that could confirm them.

I make no excuses for myself—indeed, there were none to be made, unless some prehistoric fierce survival in the quality of my love for her can be called an excuse. It is proverbial that love has some resemblance to measles: no one pities the victim, and the later in life one contracts either the worse will be the attack. I had taken no woman seriously since the

days of my calf-love, and so now must needs behave more like a sullen rustic than a civilized man. Perhaps a good sharp touch of jealousy would have pulled me together and made me exert myself to please, but jealousy, as the word is generally understood, was absurd in this case. So far as I knew, she never spoke to any man except plump little Auffret, who was devoted to his pretty wife ; and in the absence of such a bracing douche to bring me to my senses thoughts of that cursed Schofield affair tangled and twisted and wound themselves round and about my love for her, strangling every decent impulse, poisoning my ears so that her kindest words rang false, blinding my eyes so that they could not see the truth, the sweetness, and the purity in her own.

Had I been in my right mind I might have judged from her bearing that she thought better of me than I deserved. In any other case she must have dismissed so uncouth a boor without delay. But I was past judgment or self-control. Love alone or suspicion alone had been strong enough to upset my reasoning powers : and under the attacks of both, so twisted and involved together that half the time I could not tell whether love or suspicion was uppermost in my mind, or which prompted my acts and utterances, I simply went to pieces. If there was a wrong thing to do or say, I said or did it at once.

Did her attitude hold timid approach, I became a reasoning, dissecting creature instantly ; hesitating, turning her proffered friendliness over and over, so to speak, till she took refuge in stiff silences again. Even that natural resentment on her part must needs add to my suspicions ; and being no courtier at best, when I made any attempt to set things on a better footing I was safe to bungle it somehow.

The night after my arrival I did make one such effort to dismiss suspicion from my mind. Lying awake and thinking of the girl, it occurred to me that my glum manner of the evening before might have had as much to do with her refusal to accompany me as any fear of cross-examination. Madame Auffret's absence I put out of mind altogether. That had nothing to do with it, I knew. Marguerite's tone, when she mentioned it as an excuse, said plainly that she didn't expect or even desire me to believe her. So I concluded that possibly she meant to give me a lesson in good manners. In any case, why should she fear my catechizing her? In all the months we'd known each other I'd never as much as asked her where she was going aboard the *Aspasie*, and why should she imagine I should do so now? No, I'd been rude. That was it. I'd bored her—and small blame to her. Often enough I'd laughed at other men so deeply in love that they could think of nothing else, and so missed many a chance of doing those small carpet services that women love to impose. And now I'd been guilty of the same thing myself.

Next morning I procured the finest bunch of flowers obtainable in Brest in November, arrayed myself suitably, and paid a ceremonial call. The rosy country maid looked awed as she ushered me into Madame Auffret's presence, and Madame was delighted, of course, and almost went into attitudes of respectful admiration at the sight of me;—my spats, I am sure, particularly taking her fancy, though she pretended it was my bouquet. But when Marguerite entered, in a great white pinafore, her face was a picture of astonishment. She said nothing to the point, however, till Madame, after fluttering round us for a while and only just refraining from uttering benedictions, had left the room, and then she laughed and laughed so that it

gladdened the heart to hear her. "What on earth . . . ?" was all she could say, gurgling with laughter like a school-girl.

For that once I had the saving grace to laugh too. "My clothes, do you mean? Aren't they sweet? *Le dernier cri*, I can tell you."

"So I should say. They don't suit you a bit. I like you better in shirt-sleeves and sea-boots."

Perhaps it was the thought of the *Aspasie* made her flush. There it was that she had met me in that get-up. Seeing she looked at a loss for a moment I proffered my bouquet.

"For me? How lovely! That's awfully nice of you. I like them better than your clothes."

"The clothes were for you as well as the flowers," I said. "I'll call in serge and sea-boots next time, if you prefer it."

"But"—she hesitated. "Why this awful ceremony? The flowers are lovely, and it was good of you to think of me. But why dress like this to bring them?"

"Well," I said, "I was a boor when I was here last night, and so to-day I thought I'd play pretty and put on a bit of extra ceremony to make up for it."

"How silly of you! As if your clothes mattered. . . . It was nice of you to think of me, all the same."

"Are you grateful?"

"Of course I am." She laughed, but she meant it. Her bearing showed that, and for about an hour we were again on as good terms as of old. On even better terms, for I could chaff and tease this new Marguerite as I had never dared to do before. But it was the last good hour for some time to come.

The day was fine for November, and would she come for a walk with me? I asked. Yes, she would, readily.

No more excuses about Madame Auffret or anybody else. I was to go home and change—"This isn't Bond Street or the rue de la Paix"—and call for her again. Then we would have *déjeuner* together, take the light railway to St. Renan, and walk home. So all was well.

I hastened to the hotel, changed at full speed, and within half an hour met her, now in outdoor clothes and looking radiant, at the corner of the rue St. Mathieu.

"Where do we lunch?" she asked.

"Where did we lunch together last?" I returned, carelessly—and at that moment it flashed into my mind that the last time we had lunched alone together was the day of the thunderstorm, when she had fainted at the mention of a forgery case at Plymouth.

I wasn't quick enough to hide the thought. She read it in my face, and from that moment our intimacy was at an end. Each of us had something to hide, and each knew the other knew it. The lunch was a failure, the journey to St. Renan tacitly abandoned, and our afternoon was spent in loitering about the outskirts of the town, each afraid to speak openly to the other.

With such a beginning how could a man expect his wooing to prosper? Nor did it. Mutual distrust—for by a hundred little signs and symptoms I felt sure, half a dozen times a day, that she distrusted me, even as I suspected her—mutual distrust is no sort of a foundation on which to build a courtship. Again and again in those days that followed I met her hoping to restore the confidence we had enjoyed last summer, and nearly always only contrived to fail miserably. Once or twice I stayed away, and spent a day in the country alone, thinking of her, wondering how best to set about tearing down this barrier that had grown between us. More than once I made up my mind to keep away from her altogether for the time and throw myself again into the

hunt for Schofield. It seemed that was the only way to clear things up—but two excursions in search of stolen notes were enough to show me plainly that the detective had spoken the truth. Not one single note did I find, either in or outside Brest. If Schofield had ever been in the district he had gone now, leaving no trace behind him, and that way out of my difficulties was impossible.

After such absences I went back inevitably to the rue St. Mathieu, each time to be met with the same quiet kindness. But there was no laughter in her greetings now : she was again the quiet, rather distraught girl I had known months before. The alteration in her demeanour only told me the same thing, of course. She was afraid of me—liking, she yet feared me—just as she had feared me when first we met, in spite of the gratitude she felt towards one whom she believed had saved her life. And it was but a short step in my career of folly to couple her fear then with her fear now. Then she was afraid, not because of the terrors of the wreck, but because of her association with a fugitive from justice. Now she was afraid because she guessed I knew it, and knew more than anybody else of Schofield and his affairs. As I say, my mind was poisoned by suspicion. Here, with these miserable attempts at renewing our old confidence failing day after day, my distrust of her only grew and fed upon her every act and deed.

So things drifted on, getting worse and worse, for about a fortnight. Loving her as I did, desiring the sight of her and the sound of her voice, I could not keep away, but every time I saw her was a step nearer to despair. By the end of the fortnight I hardly knew I entertained a hope of her innocence—but I was only to learn how strong, unconsciously, had been that hope,

when she herself struck it to the ground and left me convinced of her guilt.

We had spent the afternoon together, and she had been even kinder and gentler to me than usual. It was as though she felt my trouble, and wanted to remove it, and for once my wretched, tainted mind whispered "cajolery" less assertively than usual. The Auffrets were dining out when we returned, and we sat together in their apartment before the fire, Marguerite with a fan-screen in her hand. The wind had stung her face, she said, and the fire was hot.

It was pleasant, resting in the firelit room with her after the exertion of a winter's day in open air and blustering wind, and my mind for once was resting with my body. We talked inconsequently in low voices, Marguerite lying back in a deep chair, her feet on the fender and the fan before her face, whilst I leaned forward with my elbows on my knees, sometimes looking into the depths of the fire, and sometimes turning half sideways to speak to her. An air of domesticity grew between us. For the while my suspicions were dormant, whilst she—perhaps the cosy air of intimacy and the dim flickering firelight reacted on her too, so that she relaxed her precautions. Our conversation got slower and slower, and our voices dropped until at last we both were silent, so that the light fall of ashes in the grate seemed a loud and disturbing noise in the stillness.

Suddenly she sat upright, with the air of one who had taken upon herself a resolution, though when she spoke it was in the same low voice. Judging from her slow, faltering speech her mind might have been far away.

"Do you—do you think it can possibly be right to do evil that good may come?"

"That calls for Jesuitical reasoning. One can't generalise. Every case must be taken on its merits. I'd do it, if I thought fit."

"You would?" She seemed encouraged, by her tone.

"It all depends on the case. I can't claim that my principles are so rigid that I wouldn't do wrong in certain cases, at all events."

"Do you think that affection for—for any person can justify dishonesty?"

"I can understand a man or woman in love breaking any law you please."

"Understand and forgive?"

"Forgive far more easily than understand, I expect, in most cases."

"You could forgive, you think?"

She had put down the screen and was staring intently at the fire, her hands twisted tightly together in her lap.

"I could forgive almost anything done by a poor soul tortured with love or jealousy," I said fervently.

"In love?" she said thoughtfully, her voice lower than ever. "I wonder if that applies—in this case?"

"What is the case you have in mind?" I asked. I didn't mean—I swear I hadn't any idea of extorting the truth from her. I wasn't thinking of the Schofield case at all at the moment. I was only thinking of her, taking pleasure in the sight of the slender beauty of her, from the firelight shining in her eyes to her dainty shoes upon the fender, and with eyes and mind full of her I spoke absent-mindedly. Nor did she read into my question any impertinent inquiry, for she answered me at once, as quietly as before.

"Put it that a man—for a long time—has been engaged in a certain pursuit. And just when he feels the reward within his grasp it all turns to—something

quite different to what he expected it would be. Put it that instead of a reward he finds only a very great disappointment. Put it that this—disappointment—must have serious consequences to—to people who are—dear to him. . . .”

“Well?” I said, and now it was all I could do to keep my voice steady. She took no notice, but went on, slowly, hesitating, with every now and then a little pause.

“You—you’re a man who has seen much life. One would call you—I suppose—a man of the world. You’ve travelled much and know men and women of all sorts, good and bad. You’re straight and honest. You’re for the law—aren’t you?—not merely because it is the law—not obeying it as sheep stay within low hurdles, because they never think of jumping them. You obey the law because you’ve seen enough—to show you the law is wise and good in the main. Would you break the law if you saw fit?”

“I would,” I said. My voice shook now, I knew, and I felt as though something were sticking in my throat.

“You would. I’m glad of that.”

She turned to look at me, and for a while neither of us spoke.

“Why are you glad?” I asked at length, wondering if she could hear my heart-beats.

“Because—I like to have your word that you would break the law. . . . It—makes things easier for me.”

Another long pause. “Yes?” I said. It wasn’t an absent-minded question now. I was strung up, waiting. I wanted her confession, because I was going over to the enemy. She was going to confess and I was going to help her. Curse Schofield and his theft, and above all, curse the taint of it that lay on her. But

no matter. I'd said I'd break the law and I would. I meant it : asked nothing better than to have the chance of breaking any laws for her. "Yes?" I said. "Go on."

"Because—if you can break the law you can forgive. Can't you?"

"Anything."

"You can understand, I think. . . . You can conceive of the temptation to a man, immersed in an affair—in affairs which he sees are bound to terminate unhappily for him . . . and others. . . . You can understand, and—and feel for him if he, for one very dear to him, throws over all thoughts of duty. . . . You can, can't you?—sympathize with him—and understand—if he breaks the law and cheats justice in the hope of ending his life in some—some happy retirement—a little farm, say, overlooking the sea"—she spoke dreamily as though she saw it. "Are you sure? Could you forgive him that?—could you, a law-abiding, honourable man, do that—break the law, and be dishonourable in the eyes of all men—to end life in such peace as that with the one you loved?"

I groaned aloud. "Yes," I said. "I can understand. Only too well. And I'll do it, Marguerite. God help us both."

She was on her feet. "Do what?" she said, her face white as paper.

"This." I was beside her, and caught her, kissing her savagely. "This, and this. I'll do it. Oh, my dear—my own sweet slender darling, of course I'll do it. But oh, the pity of it! I'd hoped to clear you, Marguerite, and instead of that, you drag me in."

"Into what? Into what?" For one short moment she had been still in my arms, but now her voice rose almost to a cry, and she struggled like one

possessed. "What in heaven's name do you mean? Are you mad?"

"Yes. Hopelessly mad. I meant to help you—but it's no good. I give it up. Can we get back the money from Schofield, Marguerite? We must, you know. We can't touch that—I haven't fallen as low as all that. We must send back what we can to the creditors, dear. If the little farm overlooking the sea is enough for you, I've enough of my own for that. Oh, my dear, my dear, how could you—white and sweet and lovely—how could you get tangled up in such a filthy business?"

She stood off from me, and her face was as I had seen it once before—the face of Medusa the Gorgon—a cold horror. Her lips drew back and showed her teeth, and lines lay upon her face as upon one grown suddenly old.

"Go back from me," she said, with her hands out before her. "Stand off, Austin Voogdt. Listen—there's some terrible, awful mistake. I've been talking carelessly and you've read some wrong meaning into my words. Stand there and tell me exactly what you think I've been saying?"

"I—I—I thought you wanted to marry me," I stammered.

She made a little movement with one hand as though she brushed all conventions aside.

"So I do," she said. "I thought you knew that. But I can't—and what has that to do with what you've just been saying?"

"You—you asked me to drop all this Schofield business and connive at theft so that I might marry you and we could go away and live where no one knows us. Isn't that what you meant?"

She didn't sway, as people are supposed to do under

a shock. Every line in her upright body seemed to shorten, and become weak curves, and she fell forward on her knees. I thought she was going to pray, but she crossed her arms before her eyes as though I had struck her in the face. What horrible mistake I'd made she alone knew. I stooped over her, calling her by name and trying to raise her, but she only shrunk back again as though she feared a blow.

"Oh, go. Go," she moaned. "Oh, the degradation of it."

I tried to make her say she would forgive me, but she only went on moaning, an unintelligible little whimper that was heartbreaking. Fearing that the Auffrets might come back I got her to her chair, and there she lay, still with her arms across her face, and still dully moaning. Kneeling beside her I tried to soothe her, stroked her hair, or patted her clumsily on the shoulder till at last she grew quieter.

"My dear," I said, over and over again. "My dear . . . Marguerite, darling, forgive me. Forgive me for a blundering fool. There was some excuse for me. . . . You said—I don't know what you said; but who could blame me for thinking what I did?"

"What did you think?" She still kept her face hidden.

"I—mad, I've been, darling—I thought for the moment that you were an accomplice of Schofield, the banker who ran away in the *Aspasie*."

Down came her arms. Her face was so altered with misery that I hardly knew it.

"And I am," she said. Her voice was a mere whisper, but every word was clear. "I was and I am Bernard Schofield's accomplice. That—that's why I can't marry you."

"Oh, what difference does that make? Throw him

over. Come to me. Whatever you've done, I love you. Give him up and come away with me, and I'll make you forget all this."

She shook her head: "No." I pleaded with her, begged, entreated. . . . I thought I understood—thought only that I had been a clumsy fool and so frightened her. Surely I could persuade her. Only let her come with me; let us find that little home she had spoken of, and live there at peace and rest, and love and be happy. My whole heart was in my voice, but her answer was the same. No. Always No. She couldn't marry me. She must stand by him.

"You shan't!" Passionately I swore she shouldn't wreck her life so. "You belong to me. I saved—yes, I did save your life—when he deserted you. You're mine."

"I can't marry you. I can't throw him over. I must stand by him all my life and help him all I can."

"Why, in God's name?"

"Because—because I love him. Now go. Go, for pity's sake, and let me hide. Let me hide myself—somewhere in the dark."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PRICE OF LOVE

THROUGHOUT what years I have yet to live may Heaven guard me from such another night as that ! Here was my reward for searching : to have followed that thief for months, tracking him through all his dodges and tricks and turnings, only to find at last that he had got away and left the girl I loved so dearly to pay the penalty for his misdeeds. Lying awake in torment, tossing and turning, her wretched story told itself over and over again, striking deeper notes of misery each time. From our first meeting, when the dead lay in rows on the *Aspasie's* decks (why hadn't the scoundrel died there like a man, redeeming his villainy by a decent death ?) to the moment when I left her weeping, moaning, in the Auffrets' room the evening before, every incident of the past six months rose vividly in memory, sparing no single detail. Wherever Schofield's fingers, dirty with theft, had touched, they left defilement behind them. Even Marguerite—she whom I had thought the soul of purity, she who stood in my mind for all that was sweet and good in life, she whom I wanted to love and shelter—she was the unhappy partner of that vile thief.

And the tainted abyss held viler, gloomier depths. Theft ? If only that were all ! Away behind the matter of the theft were hellish vistas I dare not search,

depths that only suggested—I would not let my mind dwell on what they suggested, lest blind fury should master me and drive me to do murder. What benefit to her or to me could come by conjecturing at what lay behind her association with this proclaimed scoundrel? What I knew already from her own lips was more than enough. She loved a married man, and the hound, instead of pitying, had deceived the girl. Rage racked me; tore me; fought in me with my boundless pity for her.

Though it was by her own confession I had learned she was Schofield's accomplice, I knew more. I knew she was his dupe as well. No share of the stolen money had come her way, and Schofield had never intended that it should. The detective who had watched her had said that even I had more to do with the theft than she, since some of the notes had been in my hands, but never in hers. She it was for whom the forged notes had been made. I remembered how I had found her left on the *Aspasie*, when Schofield had saved his own skin and deserted her. He had disposed of the genuine notes before he joined her at Plymouth; saved his own life; got away to France and recovered his plunder, leaving her to drown—or be tried in his place if she escaped with her life. And she loved him! By her own confession, she loved him, and so must stand by him, after that.

What hope of happiness was there for her? Villain, thief, and embezzler, she was only his victim. He cared nothing for her. She was nothing more to him than a means of escape. She it was who was to be landed in the West Indies with the parcel of forged notes; and when his plans were upset by the shipwreck he had thrown her over, and left her to face death as callously as though she were an old garment

rather than a human being. Those panic-stricken emigrants who had stamped children under water were men compared with him. And after that desertion she had gone back to the foul thief, and now told me—me, of all men!—that she loved him and would stand by him all her life.

But she shouldn't. That I swore. Here was the jealousy I had needed, and it made a wild beast of me—a cunning, calculating beast, too. I'd find Schofield, if I had to use the girl herself as the means to do it. I'd hide my heart, and seek her out, and try to comfort her. I'd make her believe me his friend for her sake. I'd gain her confidence until I found out where he was, and then . . . If I had to hunt him round the world, I'd run him down at last.

Then—once I found him, I'd half kill him. I'd seek him like a lover, and when I found him I'd take the law into my own hands and go as near to killing him as a man could do. I wouldn't murder him outright: that would be better than he deserved. I'd half kill him and then hand him, a broken thing, over to the law. I had a right to do it. I'd saved the girl's life once, and now I'd save her again from something worse than death. She was young. After a few heartbreaking months she'd recover, and there might be hope in the years before her once this villain was out of her path. I'd make it my business to remove him.

At the thought of standing face to face with him at last I shook with paroxysms of hate: the blood sang in my ears; my fingers clenched till the nails cut into my palms.—Thus I would serve him, and thus. . . . Oh, to feel my fingers round his lying throat! He should pay in full. I would do justice on him, myself, for what he had done to Marguerite; and then the

law should have him. Not till then. It should take the beaten thief from my hands, doctor him back to health again, and then punish him for his theft. But I would have my reckoning with him, first. Imprisonment was not enough for him : but it must serve—after I had done with him. After I had done with him.

Clocks in the town told the night hours, and between each stretched a lifetime of wretchedness and hate, until at last the window-blind turned grey and ushered in a winter's dawn, and with the day came the necessity to frame a course of action. I must see her, and that soon : before she had time to let him know of her confession. He must have no warning that I was on his track. I must lull her suspicions somehow ; wait on her, watch her, hide my hate and gain her confidence, until at last I learnt where he was to be found.

But it is strange how a man's mind, under the influence of strong emotions—such as thwarted love and jealousy, say—spins like a weathercock in a veering gale. A glance sways him ; a whispered word may turn him even at the moment when he thinks his utmost self, heart and brain and body, set upon one charted course.

I was at the rue St. Mathieu before ten. What my face looked like after my vigil—whether it showed any sign of the fury of rage that still possessed me—Heaven only knows ; but when we met I tried to smile. As for her, she was the picture of utter misery. Her face told me that the night had brought her no more rest or peace than it had brought to me. She gave me her hand without a word, and at her touch Pity welled up in me and drowned both Rage and Hate. I, who had come to deceive her, to trap her confidence that I might get my hands upon her lover, I kissed her hand as it lay in mine, looked in her eyes, and told her the truth.

"I've been on Schofield's track for the last six months."

She nodded, slowly and gravely. "I was afraid you were," she said.

"I've tracked him from the wreck. I know how he landed in Lewanick Cove, and how he got to Plymouth and crossed over here."

"Does anyone else know?"

"No one, I believe. The police think him dead, but they think a—his accomplice was here, and that he's got away, and now they're watching the steamer routes, and advising the foreign and colonial banks. I thought I'd better tell you this. Are—are you leaving France?"

Her face was inscrutable—the face of one who had been tortured past endurance, but who now, taken from the rack, was content at least that agony was for a while deferred. She made no attempt to answer my question.

"Are you still searching for him yourself?" she asked.

"I don't know. Let me tell you the truth. I came here intending to gain your confidence and learn from you where he was. Then I should have given him up to justice. But now, I don't know. What shall I do, Marguerite?"

In that moment she was on her knees, crying, clinging to me, her face that had been so still and calm, wet with tears and transfigured with her pleading.

"Let him go. Oh, let him go—for pity's sake. For mine. If I am anything to you—if you can ever give a thought again to the unhappy tortured girl who confessed her shame to you last night, let him go. You said you loved me once—forgive me for reminding you of it now, when your love is dead—when I have for-

feited all right to your love or friendship. But for the sake of the day when you could love me and honour me by asking me to marry you—for the sake of that day, let him go. Help him away. Help us both away. Help us find some far corner of the earth where we may live and die together, and I may forget my shame."

I lifted her to her feet and turned my back on her. More I couldn't do. Not even pity for the girl could stem the torrent of jealousy that boiled again through my heart. Help them away together! I laughed aloud, and my laughter was a snarl. It checked her tears, that laugh. I heard her catch at her breath, and we both stood silent for a while. Then her voice broke in again upon my thoughts.

"At least do nothing to betray him. If you won't help us away, at the worst don't make it more difficult for me. Oh, what can I do between you? You said you could understand and forgive a crime committed for love——"

"Love!" I cried out, wheeling on her again. "You think that villain loves you."

"I know he does." Audible even through her tears there was a pitiful pride in her voice.

"He—that scoundrel!—love you!" I flung the words at her. "He that left you to drown on the *Aspasie*. He that never meant you to share in the money he stole. You were his dupe, his victim. He only regarded you as a means of escape. Even the notes he took aboard the *Aspasie* were forgeries. You were to have been put ashore at the first port with them, whilst he, having deserted you, meant to get away with the real ones. . . . Marguerite, you don't know—you don't understand the villainy of a man like that. How could you? He's deceived you all along. . . .

Throw him over. Even now there's hope for you. You're young—later, when he's undergoing punishment you'll forget him and all this hideous nightmare, and perhaps find happiness."

"Will you help me find happiness?"

"I will. Before God I swear I will."

"Then help us away."

"No. Not that. My girl, you're blind. What hope of happiness is there for you with that villain? There's only one way out of it. He must be punished. . . . And you, you'll find rest and happiness yet. Believe me, there is no happiness possible for you with him. Once he is out of your way you may find rest and peace again, but not till then."

She was looking at me under level brows, as though she would read my inmost thoughts.

"Stay," she said. "Stay a moment. You mean to give him up?"

"I do."

"And I am to find happiness, after that? How? . . . Tell me—would you marry me now?"

I choked. Would I marry her? With every fibre of me aching for her touch I knew I should—and knew our two lives would be doomed to misery from that hour. How could I ever hope for happiness with her, knowing what I did? But not even the sure knowledge of that future could lessen my desire for her.

"Yes." The words came with difficulty. "I would marry you, I—think. But there would be no happiness then for you or me for evermore."

"Do you want to marry me still?" she repeated.

"I'm aching for you. . . . But, I know that the day we're married will be the first in a life of utter wretchedness. . . . Do you think I can ever forget this business? Can you make me forget, Marguerite?"

"I don't know. I don't know what you can forget. But you said you could forgive. I ask you again, do you want to marry me?"

"More than anything in the world."

"Then"—she looked me straight between the eyes, and her own were calm and pure as any child's—"Then take me, and let him go. That is my price. When Bernard Schofield is in South America, beyond the reach of extradition, I will marry you, if you still want me."

I caught at her and kissed her savagely, impelled by brute instinct. "I want you. I want you." Again and again I said it, hoping to persuade myself that the touch of her, the feeling of possession, would drown the jealousy. It was useless, of course. She gave herself to my arms, her cheeks to my mouth, but though her body was soft and pliant I felt her mind unbending, her heart elsewhere. No need to remind me this was her sacrifice for the man she loved: though I held her body her innermost self and soul were his.

"What's the use?" I held her off from me, and she quivered in my grip. "What's the use, Marguerite? I'm not all greedy beast. If you loved me, perhaps in time I could forgive. But to take you like this—it's impossible."

"What can I do to make it possible?" Her voice was flat and weary.

"I don't know. God help us both, girl. Every way out seems barred. If I take you in his place, and let him go, we're both the worse for it. We both stoop. There's no happiness for either of us that way. And if I give him up to justice I break your heart, and you'll never look at me again."

"Never," said she, in the same toneless voice.

"And if I step back out of it, give up all my hopes,

and let you escape together—can you find happiness so ? ”

“ There is no more happiness for me, anywhere in this world,” she said.

“ Not if you go away together ? ”

“ Not if we go away together. No. Not even then.”

“ But you asked me for that.”

“ Did I ? Oh, I know I did. But how can I find happiness now, when shame has been piled on shame for me ? To know that he could be a thief. To offer myself to you as the price of his freedom, and to be refused. Is there any step in the path of shame I have not taken ? Has any unhappy girl been steeped in degradation as I have been ? . . . But let him go. I ask you only that. Let him go, and I will think of you with love and gratitude every day till I die. Some day, please God, I shall die and be forgotten and at rest. Let him go. There is no more to be said than that : let him go, for pity’s sake if not for mine.”

She was right. There was no more to say, save that there was one shame she had not yet experienced, the shame of her story flung openly to the world. That shame I must try to save her, at any price. I saw the consequences of my trapping Schofield now more clearly than I had ever done before. Once he had learnt of my intimacy with her, and coupled it with his arrest, what hope was there of keeping her name clear of public infamy ? Would the villain that had deserted her aboard the *Aspasie* spare her now ? He would see to it that she was tried with him, and though the court might treat her lightly in view of her youth and the fact that he had deceived her, yet even though they set her free her punishment would be too heavy for her. And for me. Little as I could bear to spare Schofield, I could bear it less that the

story of their relations should be tossed to and fro from mouth to mouth all round the world. That she whom I loved should be a byeword among foul-living, sneering beasts of men and women ! The story of her life would all be dragged into daylight—her relations with Schofield—their projected voyage together on the *Aspasie*. . . . She would be held up as notorious ; she who could love and trust the villain who had deceived her—she who could offer herself as a sacrifice to shield him—her reward would be the pointing fingers and the sidewise sneers of the whole filthy world.

No, Schofield must be allowed to escape. That was the only way out. Later, perhaps, if I could insist that he went alone, I might get my hands on him. But I couldn't surrender him to the law, with Marguerite at his side.

"If I let him go, what about you ? " I asked her coldly.

"I am at your disposal. May I go with him ? " she asked timidly.

"I don't know. I think not, now. We'll see."

"Are you going to help him ? "

"I don't know that, either. But I'm not going to arrest him."

"Thank you," she said gravely.

"I don't want your thanks. Where is he now ? "

She looked me straight in the face.

"Can I trust you ? "

Could she ? Could I trust myself ? I thought not. Perhaps if I knew where he was I might be driven to seek him out, and once we were face to face I knew I could not answer for the consequences.

"I don't know," I said again. "Don't tell me now, in any case. But before we do anything towards letting him escape he must give up what is left of the

stolen property. I hold you responsible for that. If he wants money to get away I'll find it!"

"Thank you," she said again. "Will you take the stolen money?"

Her calm tone maddened me afresh. "Yes—for the creditors," I said brutally. "I'm not another Bernard Schofield."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm not a thief. I'll take the money, but I take it for the benefit of the creditors. My friends the Wests are amongst them. Pamela West was kind to you. Her husband lost all his money through that theft, and had proposed to leave her and go to sea again. You will appreciate the loss to a woman of the man she loves. . . ."

She flinched. "I—can appreciate it," she said. "I didn't understand they had lost their money—like this."

"They have, then. And you must get it back for them. Do you think you can? Perhaps Schofield has another packet of forged notes to pass off on you." Again I gave way to ungovernable rage. "Tell him not to try it. Tell him if he does, I'll hound him down, if it takes me all my life to do it. Tell him if I get my hands on him, I'll half kill him first, and hand him over to the police after, if I have to drag him there by the hair. Tell him——"

"Oh, for pity's sake, spare me," she wailed.

One look at her wretched, tear-stained face, white with its pain, was enough to curb my tongue, and I turned and left her.

It only wanted that I should meet Madame Auffret on my way to the stair, and that she should flutter round me, every word and gesture of her showing she imagined my call was part of the English procedure

in betrothal. I had to contrive smiles for her benefit—what sort of death's-head grins they must have been passes the imagination—and answer as best I could all her little set politenesses about my health and the weather.

“And how do you find Mademoiselle?” said she, dimpling.

I attempted a self-complacent smirk. “Mademoiselle gave me to understand that for an hour she would wish to be undisturbed.”

“*Mais certainement—certainement,*” said the little woman, apparently well pleased; and having gained the girl that much respite, we exchanged salutations and I got away, I hope without betraying any signs of the inward maelstrom that possessed me.

I say maelstrom advisedly. My voyagings had brought me to a gulf in troubled waters, and now I stood by the abyss watching all my treasures slipping down it one by one—hope last of all. Living in the future as I had done—as all men do, more or less consciously—I did not realise till now that that future was blotted out. My every thought and action since the *Aspasie's* wreck had pointed one way—to that future when I should take Marguerite to me for life. All the while my brain had driven me, searching, from port to port, though I had seemed engrossed in following Schofield's tracks, behind brain and body was the power that drove them both—my love for her. I had said I would find him, so as to clear her, and the thought had persisted and grown in me till it had seemed I had only to clear up the mystery of his flight to remove all obstacles between us. And now? . . . A sense of unreality grew on me: it seemed as though the interview I had just left was only a figment of strained imagination. It was all impossible that

things could happen so : that she was soiled ; that it had been my lot to discover it ; that I had half promised to help Schofield away ; that I had lost her for always. Round and round the maelstrom went, and one by one, all things good and fair and desirable, all things that made life worth living, slipped downwards in my whirling thoughts, disappearing one by one.

Walking blindly onwards—for how long I do not know, but probably for about an hour—I chanced to pass the café where I was used to sit last summer. The waiter setting out the tables under a glass screen preparatory to the hour of absinthe knew and saluted me, and with a rush I came back to reality. There I had procured the first of the stolen notes, and now I knew how they had reached Brest. It was all true. I had lost Marguerite. I was going to help Schofield away. It was all true, and this was the end. . . .

But there were Jem and Pamela West yet to be considered. I had to get their money back for them. That must be done, whatever happened. Could I trust the girl to get it ? I knew she would if it were possible, but Schofield had cheated her before, and probably would try again. More—it suddenly flashed into my dulled mind that the endeavour to procure the notes might run the girl into danger. The villain had shown already how little he valued her life, and now, desperate at being deprived of his plunder, was it likely he would consider her ? I must know where he was, if only as a safeguard for her. Though I had thought it better not to let her tell me where he could be found for fear I couldn't keep my hands off him, I couldn't let her go to him alone, tell him his arrest was imminent, and demand the stolen money, without taking some precautions for her safety.

The more I thought of it the more clearly I perceived that she would risk her life by going to him now. I pictured him terrified, hiding, clinging to the money as his last means of escape, and then the girl going to him, telling him her confession had betrayed him, and trying to make him part with what he must consider his last hope of freedom. Why, his first impulse would be to silence her for ever. What reliance would he place upon my promise to find the means of helping him away?

In a new fever of apprehension I went the few paces to the café, ordered a *cassis*, and asked for writing materials. My note was brief.

"I think there is grave danger for you in trying to procure the property you promised to get for me this morning. Before you go you must let me have the address of present holder. My promise to assist is conditional on your doing this. Either call or telephone me at the Continental between two and four this afternoon."

Could I send a note? I asked my waiter.

"*Mais certainement, Monsieur.*" At his summons a close-clipped, bright-eyed monkey of a boy emerged from the regions of the kitchen, shuffling on his coat as he came, and the note was put into his hands with an injunction to hasten. The waiter's good report of me must have lightened his feet, for he was back within five minutes, breathing hard.

"Any answer?"

No. None. Mademoiselle was not in Brest. Madame would hand the note to her on her return.

I was back at the Auffrets almost as quickly as the boy had got there, and found Madame looking puzzled. She tried an indirect inquiry or two, but I put them aside, pleaded present anxiety, and ascertained that

Marguerite had left the house within a quarter of an hour of my departure. She had told Madame nothing as to her destination save that she had been called out of Brest, but that she expected to return again next day.

CHAPTER XXIV

A CALL FOR HELP

I SLEPT a little while that afternoon for sheer weariness, only to find myself in for another nearly sleepless night ; and this time though the first keenness of my torment was lessened—merely because, being overtaxed, I was incapable of more acute feeling—to it was added self-reproach. My wearied mind could only make jerky, inconsequent flights from one aspect of the matter to another, but none of them brought any comfort. Sincerely I believed that I had sent the girl to her death. What hold had she on that thief ? . . . Let him but touch a hair of her head and I would reckon with him, after all. . . . He must be near at hand . . . not further than Paris, at all events, and much nearer if in a village or small town, or she could scarcely have hoped to reach him in time to return next day. . . . City slum or lonely hamlet spelt the same thing, danger. . . . And I had sent her into it ; sent her to try and take his plunder from a desperate criminal. . . . She loved him ; she would trust him in anything, regardless of his past betrayals. . . . If I dozed off it was only to wake again shaking and sweating with terror after some dream of her strangled into silence or beaten down with blows.

Only one thought was clear. Never for one moment was I allowed to forget that if anything happened to her, I had driven her to her death. I had been another

instrument of her evil fate. From the first moment we had met I had followed her, thinking I could bring her happiness, only to drive her in the end to confession of her shame, and now straight into the hands of the villain who had ruined her life. He, a resolute scoundrel, desperate, with his back against the wall ; she a woman in love, trusting him, believing she could persuade him to part with his plunder on the strength of a stranger's promise. And that stranger the man who had wrung her confession from her. . . . A likely story, that, wherewith to charm him into harmlessness.

Would it not be better for me to go to the police at once in the morning ? If they were too late to save her life—and I believed that more than possible—it would help his capture. And yet, if by any chance she had escaped him, telling the police could only lead to what I feared, the making public of her unhappy story.

When morning came I was still undetermined what to do ; had left my breakfast untasted, and was pacing up and down my sitting-room trying to come to some decision, when there was a knock at the door with the intimation that a lady wished to see me. My heart nearly stopped, for I believed it was Madame Auffret with bad news ; and when Marguerite herself entered the room I couldn't stand—had to put out a hand to the window-sash to support myself.

Her face was pale against her outdoor furs, but it was calm, and she even smiled a little wan smile at me when the door closed behind her. In one hand she held a brown leather bag, and this she placed on the table when, regaining self-control, I came forward to greet her.

“ You're back. Thank God ! ” I said fervently.

"Did you distrust me all that much?"

"You? Never. But I feared for you—I've pictured you dead a dozen times. If you'd been murdered, it would have been my doing."

"I was safe enough." Her smile faded as though she were sorry to be able to say it. "You have no need to blame yourself."

"Then you haven't seen—him?"

"I have. And now I've come to give myself up," she said calmly.

"Give yourself up? What do you mean?"

"I am—I was a coward yesterday. I told you I was Bernard Schofield's accomplice. That wasn't true: he was mine. I was the instigator of the theft. I had far more to do with it than he had. He only took the notes to Plymouth for me. It was I who took them from the *Aspasie*, I who put the lower values into circulation, and now it is I who bring back the more valuable ones that remain. All you have to do is to send for an *agent de police* and have me arrested. Here, look!"

She opened the bag, and, holding it upside down, shook it over the breakfast table. Out fell twenty or thirty white and green paper packets pell-mell, anyhow, some on the floor, some amongst the plates.

I was too taken aback to say a word. Picking up one or two of the packets from the floor, I saw they were solid wads of French and English bank notes. Placing them on the table, I stared at her in stupefaction. And she was smiling at me, looking brighter than I had seen her since the day of my return to Brest.

"Send for the police," she repeated. "Here are the notes and here is the thief. You've taken her red-handed."

"But—but—" I stammered, and could say no more. The meaning of it all was plain enough. She had taken the notes from Schofield without his knowledge, and now, clinging to her idea of sacrificing herself, courted arrest whilst they were in her possession, so that he should have the better chance of getting away. Thank the Fates she had come to me, and not gone direct to the police! They would have taken her, safe enough, and put her under lock and key, and tried her, and very likely have contrived to sentence her, too. And she?—she was innocent as a child of the business. She the thief! Was she even the accomplice she had claimed to be? Why, she knew nothing about the theft; didn't even know the notes had never been aboard the *Aspasie*. I knew more about it than she did.

The thought gave me confidence, and I found my tongue.

"Sit down," I told her. "Sit down, and tell me all about it."

"Send for the police, and then I will."

"Time enough for that. Tell me first, Marguerite." Then, seeing she hesitated: "You'll be wiser to tell me. Perhaps I may help you. The little you've told me now shows me you know nothing at all about the matter. I told you yesterday you were this man's dupe and not his accomplice, and now you've shown me I was right. Why, I know more about the theft than you do. Unless you go to the police with a better story than that, they'll catch you tripping in a very short time, and before you know it they'll have Schofield in their hands. You don't want that, do you? If you're wise, tell me all you know."

"I have no more to tell," said she; but there was doubt in her face.

"Then answer me a question or two. Don't be afraid. I—you know by now whether you can rely on me, don't you? I want to help you, truly I do. Tell me, did you bring those notes ashore from the *Aspasie*?"

"Y-yes." She hesitated ever so little.

"How?"

"Hidden in my clothes."

Getting up, I collected the packets and placed them one upon the other on the table. They made a parcel perhaps six inches square by eight high.

"And you brought all those of lower values as well?"

"Yes."

"That's nonsense," I told her. "Both you and I know that. You couldn't hide a parcel like this, distribute the notes about your clothing as you would."

"Then I had a bag," said she.

"You didn't, and I know it, so your story falls to pieces from the start."

"The police won't know I hadn't a bag."

"I'll see they do. I'll tell them. Your story won't deceive them for a moment. You were watched back in the summer, and they decided then that you had nothing to do with the business. I know they'll hold on to you for a while, and I know you reckon on Schofield's escaping from France whilst they're investigating your statement. But it won't do. I won't have your story dragged into the light like this to let Schofield escape. I've promised to help you get him away, but this way won't do for me. You must think of some better plan than this."

She sat with her hands in her lap, looking at me intently, her manner as calm as though we spoke of trifles instead of an exposure that would soil her name for life.

"Tell me what to do," she said simply. "You're clever. You suggest. I trust you. I'll do what you say."

"Why should I help you?" Again a passion of witless anger possessed me. To see her sitting there, calmly beautiful, and ready to throw herself away content to be a mere pawn in Schofield's game—and beyond all daring to ask me to help her in her sacrifice! "Why should I help you? I've consented to stand aside, to sink all my hopes and desires whilst you get that thief into safety. Isn't that enough without asking me to contrive and plan his escape? Between you, you've spoilt my life. You—I try to forgive you—you couldn't help yourself—but I'd kill him, if I could, I tell you straight. And you ask me to help him away!"

"You said I could rely on you," said she wearily, and at her words came revulsion, my tormented mind swinging round to pity again. I could have bitten my tongue out for my harshness.

"I'll try," I said humbly. "I'll try. But you ask a lot, Marguerite. I've lost all I wanted in the world, and now you ask me to help bury my own dead. What I can do, I will. Where is he? I must know that first."

She shook her head. "I can't trust you with that yet. I know you want to be kind to me. But you're hard at bottom: you can't forgive him; and sometimes the hardness masters you. If you, knowing where he was, felt as you did just now, you might give him up. No, I can't tell you yet. . . . You spoke just now of—of losing all you wanted in the world." Her voice faltered for a moment, but she went on again, steadily enough. "Do you—did you mean—me?"

"I did."

"Then—if you want me——"

"Not like that," I interrupted her. "I wouldn't take you like that, if you were the last woman in the world. Why, a moment ago you wanted to go to a French jail for him, and because I won't allow that you propose this as the next best thing. Failing the jail, which I gather you prefer, you'd marry me. I think not."

"Then tell me what to do," she said again.

"Oh, go," I said, rage mastering me once more. "Go. Get out of my sight, for God's sake! Here!" I opened my wallet, and took out a handful of notes—somewhere about two hundred pounds, as nearly as I could guess, for I could hardly read the figures on them. "These'll help you away. Take them and go, and never let me see your face again."

She was on her feet in a moment, her face almost happy.

"You mean that?" she said. "You mean that? And you won't give him up?"

"I never want to see or hear of either of you again." I could hardly speak for jealous fury at the sight of the gladness in her face.

"Oh!" She stooped, had caught at one of my hands and held it in both her own, kissing and fondling it like a mad thing. "Oh, God bless you! God bless you and keep you. . . . No, don't shake me off. Let me be. . . . Let me stay at your feet . . . I'll pray for you . . . Forgive,—Can you ever forgive me? . . . I'll pray for you . . ."

I shook my hand free, and turned away towards the window: then, finding I couldn't stand steadily, sat at the table as far as I could get from her—and hid my face . . . At the click of the door latch I looked up. She was gone, and the notes I had given her lay upon

the table beside Schofield's plunder that I had sought so long.

So that was finished. Like one who wakes from a dream, once pleasant, but which turned into a nightmare before it ended, I had to meet my world again, a little stunned, a little stupid, a little mechanical in speech and action, the set task before me to forget both dream and nightmare together, and get back to the everyday life of men. I remember re-packing the stolen notes in the bag she had left, placing my own money back in my wallet, and sitting down to breakfast in the most matter-of-fact way. It was cold, of course, by now, and I thought of ringing for more, but decided it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Why bother about food?

And as I strove to eat my tasteless meal, which turned to dry powder in my mouth, so I strove, too, to readjust myself to what was left in life for me—a dull-looking business, at best. The task of restoring the money to the creditors came first, and I was grateful for it as providing some mental relaxation.

Having eaten what I could, I had the table cleared, and then, locking the door, reopened Marguerite's bag, and spent half an hour in counting and checking the money. I was staggered to find no more than about two thousand pounds missing from the eighty thousand Schofield was reputed to have taken. Chance had served the creditors well. Assuming they were liable for the reward, which now would never be claimed, I had saved them a matter of about eight thousand pounds.

For a while I was perplexed as to the manner of returning the notes. Whatever happened, they must not draw attention again towards Brest. After delibera-

tion, I sent out for six boxes of cigars ; with warm water and my penknife removed the labels unbroken from five of them, and in them packed the notes, re-affixing the gaudy labels as before. The sixth I opened in the usual way.

That night I left Brest, and next morning declared six boxes of cigars to the Customs at Plymouth, pointing out that one was opened, and asking if there was any remission of duty on that account ? The examining officer showed himself grateful at dealing with one of such transparent honesty ; accepted a handful of the loose cigars ; let me take the opened box through free of charge, and within forty-eight hours a parcel containing just over seventy-eight thousand pounds, saved from the Whitby, Harrison & Schofield failure, was safe at Scotland Yard. I didn't take them there myself, for obvious reasons. The Parcel Post service of the United Kingdom was reliable enough for my purpose ; and who could swear to anyone of the hundreds of customers thronging a busy Midland post office at six in the evening ? So the secret machinations of His Majesty's Criminal Investigation Department got all the credit they deserved for that restoration ; and only the fact that Scotland Yard was—and still is, presumably—in search of the thief, rendered it necessary to conceal from the grateful creditors the methods it employed to strip him of his plunder. What my inspector thought when he opened that parcel—for I paid him the compliment of addressing it to him in person—one can hardly say, since he has been wise enough to hold his tongue about it.

When we met months later, I asked him how the notes had been recovered ; but he only looked more benign than ever, and shook his head at me as too frail a vessel to hold weighty secrets.

"Ah, Mr. Voogdt," he said. "If only we told all we knew, we should often surprise people, I expect."

"I expect we should." I agreed with him there. "But I wish you'd tell me where you found 'em. I confess I'm curious about it. You remember I was interested in the case. Were they in Brest?"

But he wouldn't answer—only shut one eye, and wagged his head at me.

"All right," I said. "Keep your silly secrets. Brest or Brummagem, it's all the same to me."

He opened his closed eye lazily. "Now, why, I wonder, should you couple Brest and Birmingham together like that?" he mused.

"Well, they both begin with a B," I told him. "And so does Bernard, for the matter of that."

"And so does Busybody," he said, rather shortly. "You'll excuse me, Mr. Voogdt, I know; but I'm rather busy myself this morning, and you're a gentleman of leisure."

But I had no heart for teasing detective inspectors when I returned from Brest. The notes once off my hands, I went back to London, and after a while succeeded in persuading Jermyn that I really wanted to go into harness again. He protested at first: said he hadn't anything for me to do: but after I'd pestered him for a fortnight, saying I was sick of idling and wanted something to occupy my mind, he consented to send me down to the South Wales colliery district for a while.

"It's a dirty time of year to go, and a filthy place to go to," said he, "and serve you right. There's talk of a big strike down there, and you'd better have a look into the labour conditions and so on. I hope to goodness

some ugly tempered collier 'll kill you with his pick. You're the greatest nuisance I know."

So I went and did as I was bid, and found some little peace. What sort of man was I to whine, because I couldn't have my way, while these poor souls could live, and be happy, too, in such grimy squalor. In the pits they worked like fiends, and above ground played like children, or sang like angels—or Welshmen—and, between work and play and song, taught me the lesson I wanted.

But for all their example, and despite my work, now and again my thoughts would stray. Going from place to place, my road often lay along the coast, and if the day was clear I could sometimes see Lundy Isle like a square cloud upon the southern skyline. That brought things back to whip me on my aching heart, so that I must bite upon the bullet and turn to my work again, striving to forget a dream. Only a dream—a girl's face framed in dark green firs—a little farm overlooking the sea.

Silly dreams. What did they matter?—What did anything matter, so that she was happy? Here were the realities of life for me—here where gaunt wheel-gearings heaved themselves above the naked shoulder of a blackened hill, here where swarming life feasted and starved and wept and loved and laughed in grimy streets of hovels round the pit head. Here was my work, and I was here to do it. No more dreams.

But it wasn't fated that I was to do that same work much longer. At a sooty hamlet with an unpronounceable name, somewhere in the Rhondda Valley, came a summons forwarded to me from London. Sight of the blue French stamp, and her writing on the envelope, showed me how little I had contrived to forget.

The paper bore the Auffrets' address, and a date

four days old, but the letter was unsigned, and lacked the conventional opening.

"I am in trouble. Will you come to me?" That was all.

So the trouble had come. Little use to clench one's fist and swear bitterly between clenched teeth. Of course she was in trouble. It had only been a question of time, that, in any case. It was well that it had overtaken her when I was within reach.

Wiring to Jermyn to send a substitute, I reached Plymouth the next day, Brest the day after. From the Continental I sent a note telling her of my arrival, and asking when I should call, but she answered it in person.

I thought her more beautiful than ever. Her trouble had robbed her of no shade of delicate colour, no line of grace, and her kindness and her gentle bearing were all that they had been.

"It was good of you to come," she said. "I have no one else to whom I could turn."

"I'm glad you thought of me."

"I have thought of you always," she said simply. "I shall think of you always, till I die, as the truest and best friend a girl ever had. If I could bring you happiness——"

What had Pamela West said?—"She doesn't talk of her troubles, that girl. She puts them behind her, and is good and kind to other people. . . ."

"I'm happy enough," I interrupted her. "I've got my work, and I'm interested in it, and so am quite as happy as I deserve. But we didn't come here to talk about me, Marguerite. You're in trouble, you say?"

She nodded. "In great trouble."

"Can I help?"

"I don't know. I—I hope so—if you will. That's why I wrote you."

"If I can, I will. What is it you want me to do?"

She twisted her fingers together nervously.

"I—I'm afraid to ask. I know you're good, but you've been hard. . . . Oh, I think that's right and proper, for a man—I'm sure you think you're right. I don't even think you ought to be weak. . . . But I asked you once, could you forgive?—" She halted, as though uncertain how to phrase her request.

"Forgive you? I forgive you? . . . If there is anything to forgive, my dear, I forgive you from the bottom of my heart."

Again she shook her head. "No. Not me. I didn't mean that. I want you to forgive him."

"You want me to forgive Bernard Schofield?" I was aghast with surprise. Of all the things to ask a man! Was the girl mad? To send for me because she was in trouble, and before telling me what the trouble was to ask my forgiveness for the thief that had caused it, and spoilt our two lives to boot! "You want me to forgive Bernard Schofield?" I repeated.

"I want you to tell me you forgive him," she said deliberately.

"But—I thought you sent for me because you were in trouble?"

"So I am. That is my trouble. I want your forgiveness for him. I want you to think kindly of him, because he's all the world to me."

"Are you mad?" I asked her. "I've told you I was happy, because it's no good whining about things that can't be helped—but if hearts break, my girl, you've broken mine. Because I try to be a man, and get on with my work, do you think I forget? All my life had turned to you—all my future, all my hopes,

all my thoughts were of you as my wife. And I find you, poor girl—you know what I found you were. I won't talk of it. God forbid that I should use a word to add to your pain. Besides, the fire isn't extinguished, Marguerite, and a very little stirring brings flame that scorches. I'm trying to forget—and some day perhaps the sting will go out of memory. But not yet. . . . And you ask me to forgive the man who has ruined your life and mine ! ”

“ Yes. I ask that,” she said gravely.

“ I can't. Don't talk of him. Sight of you and thought of him will madden me again. When you have left him, Marguerite, come to me, and what I can do for you I will. But for him—if ever we meet, I'll——”

Then at her frightened face I stopped. “ Forgive me,” I said. “ But you ask too much.”

“ But he—he is dying,” she said, with a sob.

“ Thank God ! ” I said triumphantly. “ Thank God for that ! That's the best news I've heard this many a day. When he is dead, then send for me again.”

She faced me like a tigress. “ Oh, coward ! ” she said. “ Coward—you that I thought brave. You to sneer and laugh because a man is dying with the shame of his one wrong-doing on him.”

“ His one wrong-doing ! ” At least I would try to poison her against the thief before he went. “ To leave you to drown was doing no wrong, I suppose ? To sully your name, to desert you, to scheme to rob you even of your share of his theft ? His one wrong-doing seems to have been a pretty comprehensive attempt——”

“ Stop.” She never raised her voice, but I have never heard a command ring out more clearly. “ Stop. Not another word. You—you that I thought brave—

you cowardly hypocrite. You—you dog to snap at a dying lion. I asked your forgiveness for him—and if you were to give it now I would fling it back in your face. He—he's done wrong, I know, but he's a better man than you. Yes, he—Bernard Schofield the embezzler. I will go back to him: I will be beside him till he dies: and to the day of my death may I never see you, you coward, again."

And she was gone. I heard her foot upon the stairs, and let her go, for Love again was alive in me, and pitiless Jealousy as well. They tore my heart between them, so that I could neither hold nor send her from me, so had to let her go, having enough to do to fight for self-control.

CHAPTER XXV

A REVELATION

PLUNGED again into the vortex of passion—hate and love, and jealousy bitter as the grave—love and jealousy and hate came to me each in turn, and each raw new again. To me, whom I had thought turned resolutely back upon the dusty path of everyday, the path which leads by way of work to a sane, ordered life, and in time, so older folks say, to rest and peace.

But that road was not for me, after all. I loved her more than ever. As I had said, the fire still glowed in me, and sight of her had kindled it afresh. Her beauty; the lovely anger of her—and, with a whirl, my love was torn again by jealousy. That she, so good and so loyal, should throw her beauty and her goodness and her loyalty under the feet of that beast! I'd kill him. I must. . . . No, that meant losing her. . . . I would see her again, plead humbly and entreat her forgiveness, and then show her what he was. . . . And again, No. I'd tried that. She was too loyal. I couldn't move her, no matter how clearly I showed her his infamies.

I'd go back to my work. . . . And that I knew I couldn't do. The rekindled fires burnt fiercer than ever they had done before. I must see her again at any cost—with every nerve and fibre of me hungering to have her near, I could hope for no peace away from

her. I must see her. I must. . . . And then—the deluge, for aught I cared. Whether it ended in tragedy or not, I was past caring. Let it, if it must. I must see her. I must see her again. The impulse was too strong. Nothing else would serve. No matter where the path led which was to bring me to her, that path I must follow.

But by the time I had come to that resolve, the path was closed. When in pursuit of her I reached the Auffrets' apartment, Madame could only tell me Marguerite had again left Brest. More she wouldn't say, but her manner plainly hinted that she had come to disapprove of me, and so was not inclined to be communicative. Could she give me Mdlle. Trimen's address? No, she couldn't—or wouldn't. From the prim disapproval in her manner, I guessed she didn't choose.

For the moment, burning to see her as I was, I half considered going to the police; but resolved to try first if a letter would reach her, and after several abortive attempts contrived a dozen words or so which seemed to me inoffensive, and sent them to the Auffrets' address, desiring that they should be forwarded. Her reply was in my hands within forty-eight hours. "I owe my life to him more than to you, and I hope never to see you again."

At her choice of words, rage mastered me. Selfish beast that I was, I never reflected that I might have driven her past endurance, never considered for a moment that for months I must have appeared to her rather in the light of a pursuing Fate than as a lover; and now—that she should choose such words to dismiss me rankled more bitterly than anything she had done or said before.

She had clung to that story of my saving her life

until I almost believed it myself. Though I had affected to disregard it, as men do, I had reckoned on it none the less. In a nature like hers I had believed gratitude to play a ruling part ; and now it seemed to me that only infatuation for this scoundrel who had left her to drown could induce her to write me like that.

That settled it. The fire of jealousy possessing me burnt away my last scruples. I would strive to keep her name clear, but if I failed, I failed. Not even that risk should deter me another day. Schofield, ill or dying, should be given up.

From that frenzy I was delivered sane, cool and calculating. No more would I allow my mind to be swayed by emotion. The hunt was to begin again, with a difference. The notes were recovered, and now Schofield was the quarry. There was no hope for her, no hope or rest or peace for me till that thief was taken from between us. It would hurt the girl, of course ; but she would get over it in time—and unless I was to lose my reason, she must be left in Schofield's hands no longer.

The letter had been posted at Pont l'Abbé, and to Pont l'Abbé I went. Changes at Landerneau and Quimper made the cross-country journey more insufferably tedious, but I took little notice of them or of the journey itself. All my thoughts—if one can call dull, stubborn resolve thought—were of my journey's end.

I left Brest in the morning, three days after my arrival there, and it was eight in the evening when I reached Pont l'Abbé. Nothing could be done that night ; but first thing next morning I applied at the post office for the information I required. I explained that a friend of mine, a Mdle. Trimen, had written

me from Pont l'Abbé, but that I had mislaid her address. Could the authorities supply it ?

No. They couldn't. I could leave a letter at the post office, where, no doubt, the young lady called frequently, and that was the best they could do for me.

I remonstrated, pointing out that Pont l'Abbé was a small place, and that surely they were able to deliver a letter to her without a specified address.

"Oh, without doubt. But they weren't going to supply me with her address. That was against regulations. I could address and post a letter to her and take my chance of its safe delivery. So far as he could go without transgressing the official regulations binding him to secrecy, the clerk—a good-natured looking chap, moved a little by my evident anxiety—hinted very strongly that he thought the letter would be delivered.

Was there an express delivery from the office ? Yes, there was. So I bought a letter-card and, leaving it blank inside, sealed and addressed it to her, and after handing it over the counter with the express fee, betook myself to the street outside the office, and waited. In a minute or two a young *facteur de poste* came out wheeling a rickety bicycle, its tires a miracle of patches. Beckoning, I stopped him, and asked him if he had a message for—the first name that occurred to me. Auffret, I think I said.

"Non, monsieur," said he cautiously. "Trimen."

"What address ?" I showed him a five-franc piece between my finger and thumb. He hesitated, glanced cautiously back at the post office window before taking the coin ; and then snapping out "Pont l'Abbé," swung a leg across his bicycle and was off, pedalling down the road at full speed. Buttoning my coat, I ran after him, and saw him clear of the town

before I slackened pace. And then I leant up against a wall to get my breath again, fervently desiring to wring the young brute's neck.

Once recovered a little, I was about to re-enter the town when my eyes fell on the track of the bicycle in the muddy road. It was unmistakable. On that rough country way most of the marks were only of wide wheel tracks or clumsy sabots, neither to be confused for moment with the narrow rounded groove of the rubber tires. The mud here and there gave clear impressions, too, so that even the marks of the patches could be discerned. The track led on north-eastward, and I turned and followed it.

An hour's march brought me to a place where five roads met, radiating almost equally in all directions. Here, surrounded by bare moorland, stood a wretched stone-built hamlet, where pigs and fowls listlessly explored the roads in search of cabbage stumps and other refuse ; and here upon a stretch of cobble-stones I lost the bicycle track entirely. Reflecting that at the worst I could find it again by walking a little way out on each of the five roads in turn, I entered the village wineshop—a stuccoed hovel, pretentiously entitled the *Hôtel des Trois Fermiers*—and called for a bottle of wine of Chinon. It was unprocurable, so I fell back on hard cider, and tried to start a conversation with the old woman in sole charge.

It was very little use. By repetition I learnt that the hamlet was called Planeour, but could extract no further information—or rather none that I could understand. It wasn't that the old lady was reticent. Indeed, she seemed pleased to have a customer—probably strangers were rare in that secluded corner of the hills—and she gabbled away at a great rate. The trouble was that she had very little French ; the little

she knew did not include the word *bicyclette* ; and I knew no Breton. So we were soon at a stand-still, only signifying amity by grimaces.

Suddenly I had an inspiration. In that lonely country-side, everyone must know everybody else ; so I gave up inquiring about the *facteur de poste*, and asked if she knew Mademoiselle Trimen ?

Evidently she did. Her worn, dirty old face lit up at once, and she poured out a perfect stream of what sounded like praise, from the " Oh's and Ah's " sprinkling her speech. Reminding her I had no Breton, I asked her to speak French, and she made a pretty good attempt before relapsing again into her native tongue.

" Monsieur Trimen. The architect." She knew him. " Who didn't ? The good man."

" Architect ? "

" But yes." Perceiving the word surprised me, she explained it. " Build—make—houses."

" But it is one Mademoiselle Trimen that I seek."

" But, yes. His daughter. An angel. The goodness. And beautiful ? "

Up went her grimy hands, indicating beauty and goodness past expressing in unfamiliar French.

" Where do they live ? "

" At Plovan."

" Where is that ? "

But by this time she was weary of trying to talk French, and only by constant worrying could I disentangle the words " falaises " and " Baie d'Audierne " from her fluent stream of ancient Cymric. At last I took her to her own door, and pointed out each road in turn, with the inquiry " Plovan ? " She shook her head at two of them, but signified affirmation at the third, and I set off once more, still to the north-east.

In a hundred yards the bicycle tracks appeared once

more, and I went on with growing confidence, musing on the old woman's words. Monsieur Trimen, the architect? Who was he? Only now it occurred to me how little I actually knew of this girl I loved, and yet seemed doomed to persecute. Monsieur Trimen! He must be a relation. Was it possible that he was her father? To think that I never knew whether her father and mother were alive! Perhaps she had left Schofield after all; had come back here to take shelter in her own home. My heart leapt in me at the thought, and I tramped on, almost beginning to hope.

Before I had gone a mile, I met my *facteur* returning on his shabby bicycle, and scowled at him, a salutation which he returned by an airy wave of the hand and a slap at his pocket as he passed. Soon after he had disappeared, another hamlet lay at my feet, and I asked a peasant, digging in a naked little stone-walled onion field, if it was Plovan? No, this was Treogat. Plovan? Three kilometres seaward. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder, and bent over his spade again. Where was the road? There was no road. A footpath led straight across the open heath. The road I was on went to Poldreuzic—or some such name—and the set of his shoulders, as he resumed his digging, said plainly as words that he meant answering no more questions.

The footpath proved to be a bridle track, leading higher and higher over a summit of the bare moorland. Near the top I turned and looked backwards over the country I had traversed, and of all the strange districts for an architect to choose to live in, this struck me as the strangest. For miles and miles there was never a house of any kind. Round the dozen or so of wretched sheds that made up the village of Treogat were a few walled fields, and beyond them nothing but granite,

heather and furze, as far as the eye could see. It was all an utter waste. The road I had come looped from one hill to another, and save for that and the one village, the place might have been a million miles from civilization.

A few more steps, and I was on the summit of the hill, and saw before me on another crest, half a mile away, the huddled roofs of Plovan against the sky. On either side the hill, where the land fell away, lay the straight-ruled line of the Atlantic, out away beyond the Baie d'Audierne. Ten minutes' walk, and I stood in the middle of the village looking down upon an unbroken vista of grey sea.

Below me the cliffs swept round in a majestic curve twenty miles from point to point, the village fields extending to their very edge, where, in a thicket of firs, stood a little grey stone house. An echo of her own words came to me—"a little farm beside the sea." Stray beams of sunlight from between the winter clouds made green patches upon the leaden waters of the bay, and, as I watched, one such finger of light fell upon the house amid the trees, and in that moment I knew—knew with certainty, not guessed—that there I should find Marguerite.

There were stone walls around the house beneath the fir trees, but they were low, and thickly grown shrubs in full leaf provided plenty of cover. Some were even in flower, encouraged by the mild damp season that stands for winter in that favoured corner of the coast. Pushing through them, I smelt bay and myrtle, and my sleeve brushed flowers from off a flowering daphne.

Clear of the shrubbery, the front of the house was in full view. A little lawn extended from it to the cliff edge, where it was guarded by the ivy-grown ruins of

a wall. A verandah overlooked the lawn, and in the verandah stood a deep chair with its back towards me, preventing any view of its occupant beyond a glimpse of one of his shoulders.

Undecided what to do next, I stood between two bushes, waiting.

Once or twice the shoulder moved, and presently its owner lifted up his voice, and called to some one in the house.

“Gaïd,” he called. “Marc’haïd.”

I couldn’t understand the answer, for it came in Breton. But the voice—I knew that. I should know—I hope to know it—on the Day of Resurrection.

She was on the verandah beside the chair—within twenty feet of me—before the echo of her words died away. I could see her face plainly, and it was transfigured—like the face of one of those who stand about the Great White Throne. Love shone in it—irradiated it: it was as though that shaft of sunlight which had fallen on her home had left its radiance there.

She stooped over the chair, and spoke—a low-voiced mixture of French and English and Breton. And though the words were unintelligible, the tone of her voice told me all I wanted to know, for it told of love unspeakable. That man she stooped over, the man who could call such notes of tenderness from her was the man she loved. He was the man who had come between us. It could be for none other that she had turned on me, and called me coward, and thrown me over. I was at my journey’s end. . .

She saw me first, and cried out, and at the sound he was on his feet in a flash, throwing an arm about her. Seeing me, and seeing her terror, he made a step forward as though to shelter her from me, and Bernard Schofield and myself were face to face at last.

Too late for vengeance, though. He was safe from me, for a heavier hand than mine was laid on him already. He was safe from the law: no prison yet built could hold him long. For his face was like ivory finely carved by that great artist Pain, and as he stood he reeled a little, and a hand went to his side. The man was dying; and, scoundrel though he was, he was brave. Hunted, racked with pain, with the hand of Death upon him, his lips were resolute, and in his eyes—grey eyes, strangely like those which had haunted me, day and night, for six months past—in his grey eyes there was no trace of fear.

She passed him: had come between us; flung her arms around me; and was crying to him to "Go away. Go away. Escape," before either of us had recovered from his first surprise. And at her words my pain and misery and jealousy fell from me, and I was a deserter from the cause of justice—had gone over to the enemy, horse, and foot, and guns. I knew now that it was true, what she had said—that she owed her life far more to him than me,—for when she called on him to fly and escape, the name she used was "Father! Father!"

CHAPTER XXVI

EXPLANATIONS

I DO not know to this day what explanations I made, or what she said, or indeed whether any explanations were required at all. But I do remember that when she let me go she asked me: "Can I trust you?" And I said, "See for yourself"; and went to Schofield and said: "Let me help you back to your chair"; so that it was on my arm that he returned to the verandah. I remember one glimpse I had of her eyes, wet and shining, and she was gone. When she was out of hearing I looked down on him as he lay exhausted, and said: "What is it, sir?"

"Cancer," he told me quietly. "A matter of days now. Who are you? Have you come for me?"

I shook my head. "No. For your daughter, if you'll give her to me."

"I haven't much choice about that," said he. "She'll be alone, soon. But may God deal with you as you deal with her."

Bareheaded, I said "Amen," and then left him, crossed to the ivy-grown ruin of a wall, and stood there with my back to the house, and my eyes staring at a blur of sea and sky.

In a little while she came and stood beside me, looking up at me with a new calm happiness in her eyes, and for the life of me I could find nothing to say except: "'Gaïd,' did your father call you?"

"Gaïd is short for Marc'haïd, and Marc'haïd is Breton for Margot, and Margot is baby-talk for Marguerite. Now you know."

"Why didn't you tell me——?" I nearly asked her why she hadn't told me Schofield was her father, but stopped just in time. Whatever happened, she must never guess what I had thought.

"Why didn't I tell you—What?"

"Why didn't you tell me that your father was so ill?"

"I tried, but you wouldn't listen. . . . What's changed you so?"

"One look at him. That was enough. He's brave. . . . Talking of that—I've got a lot to learn, one way and another, it seems to me. Talking of bravery, how came he to leave you on the *Aspasie*?"

"He didn't. He put me in one of the lifeboats, and went back to her deck. I got out of the boat again."

"Why?"

"I—he'd just told me why—why he was there, and I thought he meant to let himself be drowned. I'd—said harsh things. It was an awful shock, and I didn't understand his reasons for—doing as he had done. I thought he meant to drown, so I went back to stay with him. But I couldn't find him anywhere, so I waited—till you found me."

"Good. That's cleared up, then. Now, what's this you say about reasons for doing as he did? What good reason could he have for—er—going away like that?"

"None. No reason whatever. But he thought he had."

"What reason did he think he had?"

"It was for my sake," she said proudly. "He was warned by his doctor that he hadn't long to live, the

business was insolvent, and he feared he would leave me penniless. So he—stole that money.”

“Good man. I’d have done the same in his place.” Mistress Schofield, Alderlady, came into my mind as providing another excellent reason for leaving England.

“Marguerite, Mrs. Schofield isn’t your mother, is she ? ”

She laughed—laughed outright—and then became grave again.

“How absurd ! Of course not. I’ve never seen her. My mother died at Plouennec twelve years ago. Father has only been married to—that other woman for about five years.”

“Why on earth did he do it ? ”

“For me, again. He married her for the sake of the partnership. He’d been all his life in the bank, and when he became a partner, it was only to find that the business he had worked for loyally from a boy was rotten at the core.”

“So he left it ? I shouldn’t have thought that of him.”

“He didn’t leave it at once. They told him—Mrs. Whitby—I mean, Mrs. Schofield, and old Mr. Harrison—that having lasted so long, it would last their time, short of an inquiry. They didn’t care. They had money of their own, and their interest in the bank was limited. He had invested every penny he had earned in the bank, and if it went smash he would be ruined. So he stayed on—for four years he stayed on trying to put it on a sounder basis. Then ”—her voice shook—“the doctors told him he could not live, and he stole for me.”

“What did those forged notes mean ? ”

“I don’t know. I know nothing about the theft. I haven’t asked. When I found out that—learnt how he had left England, I left him. I wouldn’t touch the

money, or live with him till it was restored. So I went to live in Brest. . . . I don't want to talk about it any more. He sinned—poor dear—and he has been punished, and the money is restored. Let me forget it for the little while we have together."

To change the subject, I asked her where I should stay, and it was decided I should try to get a room in Plovan, so as to be near them. She knew the parish priest, and would arrange with him to find me a lodging, and so much being settled we went back to the verandah, to meet the sick man's eyes.

"Well, young people," said he. "You seem to be on pretty friendly terms. Does it occur to you, Gaïd, that I don't as much as know your friend's name?"

"He is Austin Voogdt, father."

"I might have guessed as much. You found my girl on the *Aspasie*, didn't you?"

I nodded.

"And you've been after us both ever since, eh? Now you've found us, what are you going to do?"

"Take lodgings at Plovan, and come and see you every day, sir."

He nodded curtly, as much as to say he understood.

"I'm glad to hear it. I owe you a good deal. . . . How about lunch, Gaïd? You run and get it, my girl, and Mr. Voogdt and I will have a talk. Sit you down."

For all his matter-of-fact tone, his manner recalled the words of Mr. Peters, wharfmaster at Millbay. "A pleasant spoken chap, 'e was."

And he was more than pleasant—he was a good man. He is dead, and the one wrong he tried to do may well be forgotten; but even had he succeeded in his theft and spent the proceeds, I would say the same

thing. Bernard Schofield, the embezzler, was a straight-lived and honest man, in all things save his second marriage and the crime which followed it, and since Marguerite was his reason both for the marriage and the crime, he gets no blame from me. For nearly two months I saw him daily, and I am glad to remember that he died my friend.

The matter of my lodgings was soon arranged. The priest—old Abbé Le Hir—learning that I was a friend of the Trimens—would suffer me to stay with no one but himself. Of Breton peasant stock, he had never been forty miles from Plovan in his life, and I am sure that in his mind the old man coupled Bernard Schofield with His Holiness at Rome. I was an honoured visitor : his grubby old housekeeper was stirred up to give me of his best, and the whole parish laid under tribute for my creature comforts. The parishioner with the finest poultry or vegetables was ordered to yield them up for me. For me no less was the pick of the fish baskets left at the presbytery every morning. A stern teetotaler—I believe the old man spent a full quarter of his meagre stipend in subscriptions to this or that "*League contre l'alcool*"—once he learnt that I was not of his way of thinking, he had the whole commune ransacked for "le whiskey" and "le gin"—awful still-waters—to suit my English palate, and whelmed me with protestations when I said I preferred cider or vin ordinaire.

If I returned early in the evening from the Trimens, it was his delight to sit and talk with me by the hour over his fire of peat and driftwood, and half the time our talk was of Bernard Schofield—here in Plovan *M. Trimen, l'architecte célèbre*. So that it was here, in this little lonely hamlet by the sea, where the natives were fishermen by night and onion growers by day,

that I pieced together what had been hidden from me of the story of Bernard Schofield's life. Between the old abbé and the dying man and Marguerite, I traced it step by step from his childhood amid the pines of Surrey to this winter, when he lay dying peacefully upon the cliffs of Audierne.

He had been wild, as folks say, when a boy. So far as I could make out, his wildness had been innocent enough : a primitive streak in him leading him to hate towns and a sedentary life—nothing worse. So he ran away to sea, and when he came back from his first voyage it was to find his father dead, and his mother, a sickly woman, harassed for want of money. He must go into harness at once for her. The sea life offered too little for years yet to enable him to keep her, and his father's friends had influence enough to get him into Whitby & Harrison's, so into the bank he went.

Once a year he had a holiday—the only bright spots in his life, he told me—and then he went back to his first love, the sea, either going for a short voyage on a coaster, or living in some fishing hamlet till duty called him back to the desk again. He hated it bitterly, but he was never the man to consult his own likings or preferences where some one else could be served, and he worked hard and with the best of his wits. Possessing intelligence of no mean order, he soon got promotion ; and was earning a fair salary by the time his mother died, when he was twenty-three years old.

The bank allowing him a longer holiday than usual, he got away to the coast of Brittany, and whilst staying at Plouennec met Marguerite's mother—Louise Éléouet—and fell in love with her. She was an orphan ; her brothers—two fishermen—who treated

their only sister as the head of the family, made no opposition, and Schofield married her within three weeks of their first meeting, under the assumed name of Tremayne—soon Gallicized into Trimen. He durst not use his own name : it was a regulation of the bank employing him that none of their clerks should marry on less than a hundred and sixty pounds a year, and he knew his marriage, if made public, would probably lose him his situation, and certainly would stand in the way of his improving his position. He explained his position, and told his real name to his sweetheart, and she agreed to marry him and let him go back to his work, whilst she stayed on where she was, keeping house for her two brothers.

If his holidays had meant much to him before, they were all he lived for, now. From the few words he let fall about her, his wife must have been such another woman as Marguerite—patient and loving, a daughter of the bravest peasantry in Europe. She made no complaints at his leaving her. Of fisher stock, her ancestors were “Terre-neuviers,” men who went to sea in early summer, not to return again till after harvest. She loved and waited, thankful that his occupation had no risks such as theirs, whilst he flung himself into his work again with all his heart and soul. Promotion soon came to him, bringing with it more pay, more liberty : he had two holidays a year now he could spend with her. And to her came little Gaïd, to comfort her whilst he was away.

He would have taken her to England as his wife openly now, but she refused to come. She was happy where she was, here among the neighbours she had known all her life. Why make a change ? Able to twist him round her little finger, in the end she had her way, and baby Gaïd grew to barefooted girlhood

in the cliff-lands of Finistère, the pet of half the village of Plouennec.

It was her mother's proposal that she should be sent to England to school. Plouennec was well enough for her, but her daughter must not grow up a peasant, to shame her rich father. There was an outcry from the child, and her father tried to back her up, but Louise Trimen had her way as usual. The child had to go, and was at school when came the first great sorrow of her life. Her mother died suddenly of a heart complaint.

She stayed on at school, and, on the day she was to leave, her father told her he was to be married again. Mrs. Whitby, widow of the deceased senior partner, had shown plainly that she was only waiting for him to ask her. He was a poor man; and the partnership that was almost certain to follow on the marriage would enable him to make Marguerite's income secure. She protested. She didn't want money. She wanted to keep house for him.

He explained gently that that was impossible. If he married Mrs. Whitby, he would live in her house. Marguerite vowed she would never live there, and—he must have had some inkling of Madame Whitby's disposition—her father didn't press the point. She wanted to live in Brittany, but he had not the heart to go back to Plouennec, so bought this little farmhouse at Plovan, altered it to her liking, and settled it upon her.

Then came the marriage; then the enlightenment as to the state of the bank's finances. Again he flung his whole self into work—the task of trying to wear down the hidden deficit—his only relaxation to spend a few days with her at Plovan from time to time. When the house came into his hands he had made the

working drawings for the verandah, and some other alterations, and the local masons at once would have that he was an architect. He never troubled to undeceive them. The idea amused him, and the village gossips went uncontradicted. Thus, when the final blow came on him, and the doctors signed his death warrant, it chanced he had a retreat where half a country-side was ready to vouch for him. What possible connexion could there be between M. Trimen, architect, of Plovan, and Bernard Schofield, defaulting English banker?

The bank was tottering. He was to die. What would become of Marguerite? . . . He planned the theft well. Years before, when a young man, he had stayed at Dawlish, and, bathing one day from a boat under the Parson, had discovered and explored the cavern. His two brothers-in-law, now retired from the Newfoundland trade, and engaged in Channel drifting, were taken into his confidence, and readily agreed to help. Etienne Bossard, the young French sailor who stopped the special train, was his wife's nephew, Georges Éléouet.

To draw a red herring across the trail of the stolen money, he had forged the notes prepared—not a difficult matter, for Whitby & Harrison had been in touch with many shady customers for some years past—and left London with both the forged and genuine notes in his possession. When the train stopped, he dropped the genuine parcel on the permanent way, whence it was removed by his brother-in-law—then waiting in the cavern—five minutes after the train had gone.

It had been his plan to take the forged notes to Argentina, show them to witnesses, and trust to the delays of extradition to give him a few months' liberty before his death. The Éléouets could be trusted to

do what they were told with the genuine notes. Schofield had arranged for an Antwerp dealer in stolen property to come to Brest and there take charge of the whole parcel, and her uncles were to hold the money received in trust for Marguerite.

Nothing shows more clearly the kind of people that they were, and the hold Schofield had over them. They were fishermen—poor as only Breton fishermen can be—and Schofield could trust them with eighty thousand pounds, all three of the men knowing well that he—Schofield—would never return to ask for an account.

But he made one slip in his carefully laid plans. He had written Marguerite to say he was going to South America on the *Aspasie*, and though he had told her he was only bound on a business voyage, something in the tone of his letter had alarmed her. Drawing some money from her own little banking account, she crossed to Plymouth, booked her passage to Buenos Aires, and boarded the *Aspasie* before the arrival of the railway tender. She thought it a great joke, once they were at sea, to send a note to him by her bedroom steward, saying that a lady wished to speak to him. And so it happened that Bernard Schofield, in full flight, hoping that the law was after him, so that its attention should be diverted from the sale of the real notes in Brest, found that his daughter was aboard the same ship. He saw at once the almost inevitable consequences. Her relationship to him must leak out, and then—good-bye to any chance of her getting the money he had stolen for her. She might even be arrested on a charge of complicity: the *Éléouets* most certainly would be. He saw his whole scheme, so carefully planned, tumbling about his ears and, caution deserting him, betrayed to her the fact that he was an embezzler flying from the law.

She, poor girl, was stunned, he told me. Again and again she would say : " But it can't be. You can wire them from the first port, and tell them how it is, and give them the money back." So she spent the first hour or two of the voyage she was going to take so happily with her father, and before she had fully realized his position came the disaster on the Lizard Ledge.

They were on the upper deck at the time, and the shock flung her into his arms. He kept his head, forced all his loose cash on her, and got her into the first boat away. Then going to his room, he procured a handful of notes—still with the idea of trying to lure the police on a false scent—put on a lifebelt, went on deck, and slipped overside just as his daughter, having left her boat, had returned to the vessel's decks to search for him.

When she got back to Brittany she believed that he was drowned. Going straight to Plouennec to see what her uncles had done with the stolen money, she found that the dealer from Antwerp had failed to put in an appearance. No doubt he had thought from the report of Schofield's death in the *Aspasie*, that the notes were at the bottom of the Channel. So the Éléouets, acting on their own responsibility, had taken about three thousand pounds worth of the smaller notes ; with nods and winks distributed them in small parcels among the friends and connexions of the Clan Éléouet, all along the northern coast of Finistère from Morlaix round to Brest ; and now proudly greeted Marguerite with an exact account of all the moneys received in exchange to date.

I gathered that her reception of the news terrified them. " They had no idea I had such a temper," she told me. Her orders were that every note was to be recovered at once. Word went out, quickly, in the Celtic way, to this or that little town and hamlet and

farm, that the notes were dangerous, and that Gaïd Trimen had brought word from England that they must be handed back to the Éléouets, who would pay full value for them. But some were gone past recovery. Strangers had them, or natives who were outside the Éléouets' influence, and of these were the notes we—the detectives and myself—had recovered in the summer. Small wonder the supply had come to a sudden stop, when all the time half the country-side, unknown to the other half, were after the notes as well as ourselves.

From Plouennec, Marguerite returned to Plovan bearing with her the remaining notes and the money her uncles had handed her. Believing her father dead, she intended to send them to England, but on returning home found him there awaiting her. His presence altered all her plans. She dared not post the money lest she should draw attention to the district round Pont l'Abbé, and so place her father in danger of arrest. She begged him to go abroad for safety, but he refused to move. Without telling her that, his death warrant being signed, he wished to stay with her to the end, he only said that he was safer at Plovan than anywhere else, and at Plovan he would stay. Hoping if she left him he might change his mind, she went to Brest to seek a living as a teacher of English, and before she had been a fortnight there Aaron Fletcher had met her in the street.

Still saying nothing of his illness, Schofield lingered on at Plovan, hoping for her return, until she had come at last in a frenzy of terror to fetch the notes, and tell him I was searching for him. He didn't care, he said, and, almost demented with fear of his arrest, she failed to see how ill he was. But after I had left for England

with the money, she went back to Plovan, and then learnt he had not long to live. Hence her letter to me, and her plea that I—whom she conceived as standing for a whole world in search of him—should say that I forgave him.

He was very weak, and failing daily ; yet I believe—I am glad to believe—he died a happy man. All his life was bound up in his girl—his girl whom he had scarcely seen for years, and now she was with him, loved and loving, every hour of the day.

He deserved happiness, too, not punishment. From boyhood he had stifled all his inclinations ; had gone into a detested employment for his mother's sake, and stuck to it, and rendered faithful service year after year when every wind that blew in the streets called him to that other life he so desired. His married happiness was short : a week or ten days twice a year—and not for many years—and that was at an end. His unhappy second marriage was followed by the discovery that the business he had served all his life was rotten, and had bled him of his savings whilst he worked. He must begin again at the beginning—shoulder as a burden what he had thought a prop for his declining years ; and with the first promise of reward for his long labours came Death, and touched him on the shoulder, saying, "Stop." He must go, leaving his work unfinished, leaving Marguerite to fight, unassisted and alone, the fight that he, for all his life of work and self-denial, had lost. I have believed myself a reasonably honest man, but I say deliberately that had I been in his place I would have done no other than he did.

His crime had brought immediate punishment. He had stolen for Marguerite, and instead of benefiting her, as he had hoped, she had left him to work for her

own living. For her sake he had faced that parting when he left for Argentina, but it was hard to come back to her home at Plovan, only to meet her reproaches and to have her desert him of her own free will.

Yet for all he had suffered, he was high-hearted : could laugh and be happy now with death nearing him every hour. He had peace, at all events. We saw to that, as well as human beings could. Marguerite and myself waited on his few wants, and old Father Le Hir came to see him daily, and would sit by him taking snuff and talking of the affairs of the village. Everyone in the place seemed to know him, and the affairs of the little households made gossip for hours at a time.

One evening after the old man had gone, he sat thinking for a time, and then looked up at me.

“What is it ?” I asked.

“Gaïd and yourself. You’ll marry her when I’m gone ?”

“You aren’t gone yet,” I said. “Bless you, there’s years left for you. The spring’ll pull you round, and I can see you becoming an awful nuisance as a father-in-law.”

He smiled—a light in his eyes that redeemed the awful whiteness of his face.

“No, I’m not gone yet. And when I go you’ll wait another twelve months. . . There’s no sense in that, lad. I want my girl settled before I go. Can you manage it ?”

“If living man possibly can, I will,” I said, and went to seek Marguerite. She wanted to wait, but I left her with her father, and went after the old abbé.

It could be arranged, he said, since I had no parents

and her father wished it. Next day, at his instructions, I went to see the Maire of Pont l'Abbé, and came back to Plovan with the official authorization in my pocket.

It was a mild and sunny afternoon, promising spring-time, and Marguerite was sitting in the verandah reading to her father, when I came round the corner of the house. He lifted an eyebrow at me, and, when I nodded, sent her into the house on some little errand.

“Is it all in order?”

I handed him the paper, and he read it through slowly before returning it to me.

“That brings things back. The last time I saw that form was when I married Gaïd's mother. I hope you'll be as happy as we were. Be good to my girl, Austin.”

What I said—it was very little—seemed to reassure him, and we sat for a while looking out over the sea. He broke the silence.

“You'd better have a talk with her to-night. My time's short now.”

It was shorter than we expected. At midnight came a summons for Père Le Hir: “Extreme Unction. M. Trimen was passing.”

When I got there, the servant-maid let me into the house, crying bitterly. Mademoiselle Gaïd was with her father. Would I go up alone? “I can't let her see me like this,” she sobbed.

I tried to quiet her till she choked down her sobs, and, when the abbé and his assistant arrived, we went upstairs together. Marguerite was sitting by her father. She was calm, but Schofield was the calmest of the five of us.

“Extreme Unction. That's wrong,” he whispered. “Not that Sacrament I want, Father. Marriage.”

So we were married then and there, and when presently he said he was tired—he could sleep, he thought,

his pain being easier—it was my wife who stayed by him, whilst I walked in the dark garden, wondering whether I was sad or very, very happy.

And just as Sirius set out over the sea, and the first landward stars began to pale, she came to me upon the cliff edge, and clung to me, and cried, sobbing out that I was all she had.

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